George Manville Fenn

"The Rajah of Dah"

Chapter One.

Off at last!

“Ahoy, there! All on board?”

“Yes; all right.”

“Got all your tackle?”

“I think so.”

“Haven’t forgotten your cartridges!”

“No; here they are.”

“I’ll be bound to say you’ve forgotten something. Yes: fishing-tackle?”

“That we haven’t, Mr Wilson,” said a fresh voice, that of a bright-looking lad of sixteen, as he rose up in the long boat lying by the bamboo-made wharf at Dindong, the little trading port at the mouth of the Salan River, on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula.

“Trust you for the fish-hooks, squire,” said the first speaker. “But, I say, take a good look round, Murray. It’s an awful fix to be in to find yourself right up in the wilderness with the very thing you want most left behind.”

“It’s very good of you, Wilson,” said the gentleman addressed, a broad-shouldered man of forty, tanned and freckled by the eastern sun, and stooping low to avoid striking his head against the attap thatch rigged up over the stern of the boat, and giving it the aspect of a floating hut. “It’s very good of you, but I think we have everything; eh, Ned?”

“Yes, uncle; I can’t think of anything else.”

"Knives, medicine, sticking-plaster, brandy, boxes, spirit-can, lamp, nets. Ah, I know, Ned: we've no needles and thread."

The lad laughed merrily, and took out a kind of pocket-book, which he opened to display the above necessaries, with scissors and penknife as well.

"Well done, Ned! I believe you have more brains than I have. I can't think of anything else, Wilson. I only want your good wishes."

"Matches?" said the gentleman on the wharf.

"Plenty, and we have each a burning-glass."

"That's right, and now once more: take my advice."

Johnstone Murray, enthusiast over matters of natural history, shook his head, and rather a stern look came into his eyes as his nephew watched him eagerly.

"But, hang it, man! you can make excursions up and down the river from Dindong, and up the little branches as well. Surely you can get all you want from here, and not lose touch of civilisation."

"But we want to lose touch of civilisation, my dear fellow.—What do you say, Ned? Shall we stop here?"

"No, no, uncle; let's go now."

"Why, you foolish boy!" cried the gentleman addressed as Wilson, "you do not know what you are saying, or what risks you are going to run."

"Oh, uncle will be careful, sir."

"If he can," said the other, gruffly. "I believe you two think you are going on quite a picnic, instead of what must be a dangerous expedition."

"My dear Wilson," said the principal occupant of the boat, merrily, "you shut yourself up so much in your bungalow, and lead such a serious plodding life over your merchandise and cargoes, that you see danger in a paddle across the river."

"Ah, well, perhaps I do," said the merchant, taking off his light pith sun-hat to wipe his shining brow. "You really mean to go right up the river, then?"

"Of course. What did you think I made these preparations for?"

"To make a few short expeditions, and come back to me to sleep and feed. Well, if you will go, good-luck go with you. I don't think I can do any more for you. I believe you may trust those fellows," he added in a low voice, after a glance at the four bronzed-looking strong-armed Malay boatmen, each with a scarlet handkerchief bound about his black hair as he sat listlessly in the boat, his lids nearly drawn over his brown lurid-looking eyes, and his thick lips more protruded than was natural, as he seemed to have turned himself into an ox-like animal and to be chewing his cud.

"You could not have done more for me, Wilson, if I had been your brother."

"All Englishmen and Scotsmen are brothers out in a place like this," said the merchant, warmly. "Go rather hard with some of us if we did not stick to that creed. Well, look here, if ever you get into any scrape up yonder, send down a message to me at once."

"To say, for instance, that a tiger has walked off with Ned here."

"Oh I say, uncle!" cried the boy.

"No, no, I mean with the niggers. They're a rum lot, some of them. Trust them as far as you can see them. Be firm. They're cunning; but just like children in some things."

"They're right enough, man, if you don't tread on their corns. I always find them civil enough to me. But if we do get into trouble, what shall you do?"

"Send you help of course, somehow. But you will not be able to send a letter," added the merchant thoughtfully. "Look here. If you are in trouble from sickness, or hurt by any wild animal, get some Malay fellow from one of the campongs to bring down a handkerchief—a white one. But if you are in peril from the people up yonder, send a red one, either your own or one of the boatmen's. You will find it easy to get a red rag of some sort."

"I see," said Murray, smiling. "White, sickness; red, bloodshed.—I say Ned, hear all this?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Well; don't you feel scared?"

"Horribly, uncle," said the boy, coolly.

"Will you give up, and stop here in Dindong?"

The boy looked full in the speaker's face, thrust his hands into the pockets of his brown linen trousers, and began to whistle softly.

"There, good-bye, Wilson. The sun will soon be overpowering, and I want to get on."

"Well, you've got the tide to help you for the next three hours. Sorry you're going. I'll take great care of the specimens you send down. You can trust any of the boat-people—they know me so well. Any fellow coming down with rice or tin will bring a box or basket. God bless you both! Good-bye!"

There was a warm hand-shaking.

"Take care of yourself, Ned, my boy, and don't let your uncle work you too hard.—Good-bye, my lads. Take great care of the sahibs."

The Malay boatmen seemed to have suddenly wakened up, and they sprang to their places, responded with a grave smile to the merchant's adjuration, pushed off the boat, and in a few minutes were rowing easily out into the full tide, whose muddy waters flowed like so much oil up past the little settlement, upon whose wharf the white figure of the merchant could be seen in the brilliant sunshine waving his hand. Then, as the occupants of the boat sat in the shade of their palm-leaf awning, they saw a faint blue smoke arise, as he lit a cigar and stood watching the retiring party. The house, huts, and stores about the little wharf began to grow distant and look toy-like, the shores to display the dull, green fringe of mangrove, with its curiously-arched roots joining together where the stem shot up, and beneath which the muddy water glided, whispering and lapping. And then the oars creaked faintly, as the boat was urged more and more out into mid-stream, till the shore was a quarter of a mile away; and at last the silence was broken by the boy, whose face was flushed with excitement, as he stood gazing up the smooth river, while they glided on and on through what seemed to be one interminable winding grove of dull-green trees; for he made the calm, grave, dark-skinned

boatmen start and look round for danger, as he cried out excitedly:

"Hurrah! Off at last!"

Chapter Two.

Uncle Murray's Lecture.

"Every man to his taste, Ned, my boy," said Johnstone Murray, gentleman, to his nephew, who was home for a visit to his uncle—he called it home, for he had never known any other, and visited this but rarely, his life having been spent during the past four years at a Devon rectory, where a well-known clergyman received four pupils.

As the above words were said about six months before the start up the Salan River, Ned Murray's guardian raised a large magnifying-glass and carefully examined a glittering fragment of stone, while the boy leaned over the table upon which his elbows rested, and eagerly watched his uncle's actions.

"Is that gold, uncle?"

"Eh? gold? nonsense. Pyrites—mingling of iron and sulphur, Ned. Beautiful radiated lines, those. But, as I was saying, every man to his taste. Some people who have plenty of money like to go for a ride in the park, and then dress for dinner, and eat and drink more than is good for them. I don't. Such a life as that would drive me mad."

"But you didn't answer my question, uncle."

"Yes, I did, Ned. I said it was pyrites."

"No, no. I mean the other one, uncle. Will you take me?"

"Get away with you! Go back to the rectory and read up, and by-and-by we'll send you to Oxford, and you shall be a parson, or a barrister, or—"

"Oh, uncle, it's too bad of you! I want to do as you do. I say: do take me!"

"What for?"

"Because I want to go. I won't be any trouble to you, and I'll work hard and rough it, as you call it; and I know so much about what you do that I'm sure I can be very useful; and then you know what you've often said to me about its being so dull out in the wilds by yourself, and you would have me to talk to of a night."

"Silence! Be quiet, you young tempter. Take you, you soft green sapling! Why, you have no more muscle and endurance than a twig."

"Twigs grow into stout branches, uncle."

"Look here, sir: did your tutor teach you to argue your uncle to death when you wanted to get your own way?"

"No, uncle."

"Do you think I should be doing my duty as your guardian if I took you right away into a savage country, to catch fevers and sunstrokes, and run risks of being crushed by elephants, bitten by poisonous reptiles, swallowed by crocodiles, or to form a lunch for a fastidious tiger tired of blacks?"

"Now you are laughing at me again," said the boy.

"No, sir. There are risks to be encountered."

"They wouldn't hurt me any more than they would you, uncle."

"There you are again, arguing in that abominable way! No, sir; I shall not take you. At your ago education is the thing to study, and nothing else. Now, be quiet!" and Johnstone Murray's eyes looked pleasant, though his freckled brown face looked hard, and his eyes seemed to say that there was a smile hidden under the grizzled curly red beard which covered the lower part of his face.

"There, uncle, now I have got you. You've said to me scores of times that there was no grander education for a man than the study of the endless beauties of nature."

"Be quiet, Ned. There never was such a fellow as you for disputing."

"But you did say so, uncle."

"Well, sir, and it's quite right. It is grand! But you are not a man."

"Not yet, but I suppose I shall be, some day."

"Not if I take you out with me to catch jungle fever."

"Oh, bother the old jungle fever!"

"So say I, Ned, and success to quinine."

"To be sure. Hurrah for quinine! You said you took it often in swampy places to keep off the fever."

"That's quite right, Ned."

"Very well then, uncle; I'll take it too, as much as ever you like. Now, will you let me go?"

"And what would the rector say?"

"I don't know, uncle. I don't want to be a barrister. I want to be what you are."

"A rough, roaming, dreamy, restless being, who is always wandering about all over the world."

"And what would England have been, uncle, if some of us had not been restless and wandered all over the world."

Johnstone Murray, gentleman and naturalist, sat back in his chair and laughed.

"Oh, you may laugh, uncle!" said the boy with his face flushed. "You laugh because I said some of us: I meant some of you. Look at the discoveries that have been made; look at the wonders brought home; look at that, for instance," cried the boy, snatching up the piece of pale, yellowish-green, metallic-looking stone. "See there; by your discoveries you were able to tell me that this piece which you brought home from abroad is pyrites, and—"

"Hold your tongue, you young donkey. I did not bring that stone home from abroad, for I picked it up the other day under the cliff at Ventnor, and you might have known what it was from any book on chemistry or mineralogy.—So you want to travel?"

"Yes, uncle, yes!" cried the boy.

“Very well, then; get plenty of books, and read them in an easy-chair, and then you can follow the footsteps of travellers all round the world without getting shipwrecked, or having your precious soft young body damaged in any way.”

“Oh dear! oh dear!” sighed the boy; “it’s very miserable not to be able to do as you like.”

“No, it isn’t, stupid! It’s very miserable to be able to do nearly as you like. Nobody can quite, from the Queen down to the dirtiest little boy in the streets. The freest man finds that he has the hardest master to satisfy—himself.”

“Oh, I say, uncle!” cried the boy; “don’t, don’t, please; that doesn’t seem like you. It’s like being at the rectory. Don’t you begin to lecture me.”

“Oh, very well, Ned. I’ve done.”

“That’s right; and remember you said example was better than precept.”

“And so it is, Ned.”

“Very well then, uncle!” cried the boy; “I want to follow your example and go abroad.”

Johnstone Murray brought his fist down bang upon the table of his study—the table covered with books, minerals, bird-skins, fossils, bones, and the miscellaneous odds and ends which a naturalist delights in collecting round him in his half study, half museum, where as in this case, everything was so sacred that the housemaid dared hardly enter the place, and the result was a cloud of dust which immediately made Ned sneeze violently. Then his uncle sneezed; then Ned sneezed; then they both sneezed together, and again and again.

“Oh, I say, uncle!” cried Ned; and he sneezed once more.

“Er tchishou! Bless the king!—queen I mean,” said the naturalist.

“You shouldn’t, uncle,” cried the boy, now laughing immoderately, as his uncle sneezed and choked, and wiped his eyes.

“It was all your fault, you young nuisance. Dear me, this dust—”

"Ought to be saved for snuff."

"Now, look here, Ned," said Mr Murray at last. "I do not say that some day when you have grown up to be a man, I may not ask you to accompany me on an expedition into some new untried country, such as the part of the Malay Peninsula I am off to visit next."

"How long will it be before you consider I am a man, uncle?"

"Let's see; how old are you now?"

"Sixteen turned, uncle."

"Humph! Well, suppose we say at one and twenty."

"Five years!" cried the boy in despair. "Why, by that time there will not be a place that you have not searched. There will be nothing left to discover, and—" (a sneeze), "there's that dust again."

"You miserable young ignoramus! what are you talking about?" cried the naturalist. "Why, if a man could live to be a hundred, and have a hundred lives, he would not achieve to a hundredth part of what there is to be discovered in this grand—this glorious world."

He stood up with one hand resting on the table, and began to gesticulate with the other.

"Why, my dear boy, before I was your age I had begun to take an active interest in natural history, and for considerably over twenty years now I have been hard at work, with my eyes gradually opening to the wonders on every hand, till I begin now to feel sorrow and delight at how little I know and how much there is yet to learn."

"Yes, uncle; go on," cried the boy, eagerly.

"You said I was not to lecture you."

"But I like it when you talk that way."

"Ah, Ned, Ned! there's no fear of one's getting to the end," said Murray, half sadly; "life is far too short for that, but the life of even the most humble naturalist is an unceasing education. He is always learning—always finding out how beautiful are the works of the Creator. They are endless, Ned, my boy. The grand

works of creation are spread out before us, and the thirst for knowledge increases, and the draughts we drink from the great fount of nature are more delicious each time we raise the cup."

Ned's chin was now upon his thumbs, his elbows on the table once more, and his eyes sparkled with intense delight as he gazed on the animated countenance of the man before him; for that face was lit up, the broad forehead looked noble, and his voice was now deep and low, and now rang out loudly, as if he were some great teacher declaiming to his pupil on the subject nearest to his heart. Till it suddenly dawned upon him that, instead of quenching, he was increasing the thirst of the boy gazing excitedly in his eyes, and he stopped short in the lamest way, just as he was rising up to the highest pitch of his eloquence.

"Yes, uncle, yes!" cried Ned. "Go on—go on."

"Eh? No; that's all, my boy; that's all."

"But that isn't all!" cried Ned excitedly, rising now. "That's only the beginning of what I want to learn. I want to road in those books, uncle. I want to drink from that glorious fountain whose draughts are sweeter every time. I want to—I want to—I want to— Oh uncle, oh uncle, go on! do take me with you, there's a dear old chap."

The boy stretched out his hand, which was slowly taken and pressed as Johnstone Murray said in a subdued tone: "God grant that I may be doing rightly for you, Ned. You've beaten me finely with my own weapons, my boy."

"And you'll take me?"

"Yes, Ned, I give in. You shall be my companion now."

"Hurrah!"

Ned sprang on to his chair, then on to the table, and waved his hand above his head. A month later he was on his way in one of the French boats to Singapore, from whence, after making a few final preparations, they went up in a small trading-steamer to the little settlement of Dindong, on the Salan River. Here they made a fortnight's stay to engage a boat and men, and learn a little more of the land they were to explore, and at last the morning came when they parted from the hospitable merchant to whom Murray had had introductions; and the

bamboo wharf had faded quite from sight, when Ned Murray again cried excitedly:

"Hurrah! Off at last!"

Chapter Three.

Up the River.

It was early morning yet, and the mists hung low, but the torrid sun rapidly dissipated each opalescent gauzy vapour, and before long the sky was of that vivid blue which reflected in the surface of the river changed its muddy hue, and gave it a beauty it really did not possess. Nothing can be more dull and monotonous than the fringe of mangroves which line the tidal waters of river and creek in the tropics, and after sitting watching the dingy foliage and interlacing roots for some time, in the hope of seeing some living creature, Ned Murray began to scan the river in search of something more attractive; but for a time there was the glistening water reaching on and on before them, now fairly straight, now winding and winding, so that at times they were completely shut in by the mangroves, and the Malays appeared to be rowing in a lake.

"Not much of scenery this, Ned," said Murray, after a long silence.

"That's what I was thinking, uncle. But I say, is it going to be all like this?"

"I should hope not. Oh no! these trees only grow where they can feel the sea-water, I believe. As we get higher up, where the river begins to be fresh, we shall see a change."

"But it's all so still. No fish, no birds, and no chance of seeing the animals for those trees."

"Patience, my lad, patience."

"But hadn't we better get out the guns and cartridges, or the fishing-tackle?"

"Nothing to shoot as yet, nothing to catch, I should say; but we'll have out a gun soon. Any fish to be caught here with a line, Hamet?"

The nearest of the Malay boatmen smiled, ceased rowing, and said in fairly good English, but with a peculiar accent: "Few; not many. Shrimps when the water is low."

"Oh! but we can't fish for shrimps without a net," said Ned, contemptuously; "and that's stupid sport. I did fish with a net once down in Devonshire, but I did not want to do it again. Why, I should have thought a river like this would have been full of something."

"Hah!" said the Malay, pointing, and Ned followed the direction indicated by the man's long brown finger.

"Eh? what?" said the boy, staring across the water. "What is it—a bird? where?"

"Don't you see. There, fifty yards away, on the surface of the water?"

"No; I can't see anything. Yes, I can; two brown-looking knobs. What is it? Part of a tree. Oh! gone. I know now; it was a crocodile."

"No doubt about that, Ned, and I daresay we shall see plenty more."

"Hah!" ejaculated the Malay again; and he pointed this time toward the right bank of the river, or rather to the fringe of mangroves on that side.

"Yes, I can see that one plain, just those two knobs. Why doesn't it show more?"

"For the sake of being safe perhaps. There you can see its yes now, just above the surface."

"But the gun, uncle. Let's shoot one."

"Waste of powder and ball, my boy. It is a great chance if we could hit a vulnerable part, and I don't like wounding anything unnecessarily."

"Are there many of those things here?" said Ned, after watching the two prominences just above the water, and vainly trying to make out the reptile's body.

"Many things?" said the man, evidently puzzled.

"Yes; crocodiles?"

"Hah! Yes, plenty, many; sahib jump in and swim, crocodile—"

He ceased speaking and finished in pantomime, by raising one hand and rapidly catching the other just at the wrist.

"Snap at me?" said Ned.

"Yes, sahib. Catch, take under water. Eat."

"I say, though, is he stuffing me? Do they really seize people, or is it a traveller's tale?" said Ned, appealing to his uncle; but the Malay, who had been engaged from his knowledge of English to act as interpreter up the river, caught at the boy's words, though he did not quite grasp his meaning.

"No, no, sahib; not stuff you. Crocodile stuff, fill himself much as he can eat."

Then he turned sharply and said a few words to his companions in the Malay tongue, and they replied eagerly in chorus.

"There's no doubt about it, Ned," said his uncle. "They are loathsome beasts, and will drag anything under water that they can get hold of."

"Then we ought to kill it," said Ned excitedly. "Let's shoot it, at once."

"Where is it?"

"That one's gone too," said Ned, with a disappointed air.

"Plenty more chances, my boy; but if you do try your skill with a gun, wait till we see one of the reptiles on the bank."

"But there is no bank."

"Wait a bit, and you'll see sand-banks and mud-banks in plenty. But the appearance of those creatures answers one of your questions. There must be plenty of fish in the river, for that forms their principal food."

Just then their attention was taken up by one of the Malay boatmen drawing in his oar, and then taking out a small bag from which he extracted a piece of broken betel-nut and a half-dried leaf. Then from the same bag he took a small brass box

carefully hammered to form a pattern, and upon opening this a thick white paste became visible.

“What’s that?” whispered Ned.

“Lime made from coral and mixed into a paste with water.”

“But what is he going to do?”

“Watch him.”

Ned was already watching, and saw the man take a little of the wet lime paste from the box with his finger, and smear it over the leaf. Then the box was put away, and the scrap of nut carefully rolled up in the leaf and placed in the man’s mouth, when he went on contentedly chewing as he resumed his oar and pulled steadily on.

“I never saw them get their betel ready to chew before, uncle,” whispered Ned. “I say, what leaf is that?”

“Sirih, a little climbing kind of pepper.”

“Well,” continued Ned with a laugh; “I don’t know whether that’s a bad habit, but it looks a very nasty one. What savages!”

“They might say the same about our Jacks with their tobacco,” said his uncle.—“How would you like to live there?”

He pointed to where, in an opening in the mangroves, a tiny village of a few houses became visible, mere huts, but pretty enough to look at with their highly-pitched, palm-thatched roofs, showing picturesque gables and ornamentally woven sides, the whole raised on bamboo piles, so as to place them six or eight feet above the level of the river. A few cocoa-nut trees grew close at hand, and a couple of good-sized boats were drawn up and tied to posts, while a group of the occupants stood gazing at the passing party.

“No; I don’t think I should like to live there,” said Ned, as the men rowed on, and the houses with their cluster of palm-like trees gave place once more to the monotonous green of the mangroves. And now the boy altered his tactics. For a time he had scorned the shelter of the thatched roof which covered the afterpart of the roomy boat, and been all life and activity, making the Malays smile at his restlessness, as he passed among them resting his hand first on one, then on another brawny shoulder, to get right forward to the sharply-pointed

prow, and sit there looking up the river; while his uncle rearranged some of the packages and impedimenta necessary for their long trip.

"There," he said, as he finished for the time, by hanging two guns in slings from the roof, Ned having returned to sit down, and he began wiping his face. "I think that will do. If we had designed a boat to suit us for our trip, we couldn't have contrived anything better. That is the beauty of travelling in a country where the rivers are the only roads. You require no bearers, and you have no worry about men being dissatisfied with their loads, and then having to set up a tent when the day's journey is over. Here we are with a roof over us in our travelling tent, and all we have to do at night is to tether the boat to the shore, have a fire lit for cooking, and eat, sleep, and rest."

"But you will not always keep to the boat, uncle?"

"No; we shall make a few little expeditions when we can, but, from what I have learned, the country farther north and east is nearly all jungle, with only a few elephant tracks through the forest by way of roads. Here, hadn't you better sit still for a bit out of the sun."

"Yes; coming back directly," was the reply; and, going forward, Ned stood with his hands in his pockets gazing up the river. "I say, uncle," he cried at last; "I'm getting tired of these mangroves. Why, the shore's all alike, and oh, how hot it is!"

The Malays rowed steadily on with their eyes half-closed, paying not the slightest heed to the rays of the sun, which seemed now to be pouring down with a fervour that was terrible. The tide still set up the river, and very little exertion on their part kept a good way on the boat, as they swung to and fro, keeping pretty well together, their eyes half-closed, and their jaws working at the betel-nut each man had in his cheek.

"Here, come into shelter till the heat of the day is past," said Murray.

"All right, uncle."

Ned was standing right up on the prow, intently watching the two prominences over the eyes of one of the crocodiles which was gliding slowly about in the tideway on the look-out for food, when the summons came, and turning sharply, a peculiar sensation of giddiness attacked him. He threw up his hands to

his head, and in an instant lost his balance, plunged in head foremost and was gone.

As the water splashed in over the bows, Hamet uttered a shout, the men ceased rowing, and Murray rushed out from beneath the shelter, tearing off his loose linen jacket, and eagerly scanning the water, ready to plunge in as soon as Ned reappeared.

"No, no," cried Hamet, hoarsely; and then, giving a sharp order to his companions, the course of the boat was changed, and he leaned over the side, the men muttering excitedly to each other, for they had seen the eyes of the crocodile sink beneath the water just as the loud splash was made when the boy fell in.

It was a matter of only a few moments before there was a movement in the dark water three or four yards away. The men on the side opposite gave their oars a sudden dip and drag, the boat swung round across the tide, and, reaching over, Hamet caught Ned's wrist, dragged him to the side just as there was a sharp shock against the forward part of the boat, a jerk, and a sensation communicated to the occupants as if they had come into collision with the trunk of a tree, and it was passing under the boat. While, as with Murray's help, Hamet hauled the boy into the boat, there was a tremendous swirl in the water, just where he had been, a great horny tail rose above the surface and struck it with a sharp slapping sound, and disappeared.

"That was close!" exclaimed Murray, as the boat glided on, and the Malays talked rapidly together, Hamet giving his employer a curiously significant look.

At that moment Ned opened his eyes, sat up quickly, and then struggled to his feet.

"Did I go overboard?" he said. "Yes; I remember," he continued quickly. "I felt giddy all at once. Oh! my hat."

This had been forgotten, but there it was floating on the surface only a short distance away, and a few strokes of the oars enabled him to recover it.

"There, get under the roof and change your things," said his uncle. "We'll wring these out, and they'll soon dry in the sun."

"Yes; but who pulled me out?" cried Ned; and on being told, he held out his hand to Hamet, who took it respectfully, and bent over it for a moment.

"Thank you," said Ned; and then, "was it the sun made me turn like that? I say, uncle, it would have been awkward if that old crocodile had caught sight of me."

"This is a bad beginning, Ned," said Murray gravely. "That hideous reptile did see you, and was within an ace of getting hold."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Ned, changing colour.

"No crocodiles much higher up," said Hamet.

"Then the sooner we are higher up the better," muttered Murray as the boat glided on; and Ned was very quiet as he changed his wet things.

"I say, uncle," he said at last, "I'm very sorry. I did mean to be careful, and not do anything to worry you. I couldn't help that, could I?"

"No, it was an accident, and will be a lesson to you to be careful. You see how soon anything goes wrong."

About this time the tide, which had helped them well on their upward journey, began to grow slack, then to pause; and the men rapidly rowed across to the edge of the mangroves, where the boat was made fast in the shade, and Hamet signified that they would rest now for some hours till the tide turned, and the sun was beginning to get low.

Food was produced, but Ned did not want much dinner, and sat with rather a disgusted look upon his countenance, gazing between the leaves at the surface of the river, watching for the muddy-looking prominences above the eyes of the crocodiles; and thinking how he should like to spend the next few days gliding about in a boat, sending bullets into the brains of the treacherous-looking brutes as they slowly swam about in the tidal stream.

The sound of heavy breathing made him turn his head at last to see that the Malays were all fast asleep, and that his uncle had followed their example; and as Ned looked, he could see the great drops of perspiration standing upon his forehead.

Perhaps it was the effect of seeing others asleep—perhaps the heat—at any rate, the result was that a drowsy sensation stole over the boy; and the dark leaves which touched the palm thatching of the roof, the metallic dazzling glare from the

surface of the river, and the rippling sound of the water all passed away, as Ned dropped into a dreamless sleep, which lasted till he was touched by his uncle.

"Wake up, Ned. Going on."

"Have I been asleep?"

"Look for yourself."

The Malays were forcing the boat out into the stream once more, which, instead of glancing like molten silver with a glare which was painful to the eyes, now seemed to be of a deep glowing orange, the reflection of the wondrous sky rapidly changing in its refulgent hues from gold to orange, to a deep-red and purple, as the sun sank rapidly behind the great dark belt of trees on their left.

"The tide is just upon the turn again. Can't you feel that it is much cooler?"

"No, not yet," replied Ned. "I turned hot when we first got to Singapore, and I've never been cool since."

"Not when you plunged into the river?"

Ned gave him a sharp look.

"I don't remember anything about that," he replied; "but I say, uncle, you might let me have a shot at one of the crocs now."

Murray laughed, but made no reply, and they sat in silence watching the wonderful sunset, as the men, well refreshed, sent the boat along at a pretty good rate, the tide soon afterwards lending its help. This was kept on till long after dark, and the crew did not cease rowing till they came abreast of another tiny village. Here they fastened the boat to a post in company with a couple more, after exchanging a few words with some dusky-looking figures on the strip of shore, beyond which a group of huts could be just made out, backed by trees, which looked of an intense black, while above them was the purple sky spangled with stars which seemed double the size of those at home.

This time Ned was quite ready for his share of the evening meal, which was eaten in silence as the travellers sat watching a patch of bushes which grew where the mangroves ceased.

“Why, it’s just like a little display of fireworks,” Ned whispered. “As if the people there were letting them off because we had come.”

“Yes; it is very beautiful. Look! they seem to flash out like the sparks in a wood fire, when the wind suddenly blows over it, and then go out again.”

“Yes,” said Ned thoughtfully; “our glow-worms that we used to find and bring back to put in the garden were nothing to them. Look at that!”

He pointed to where a bright streak of light glided through the darkness for a few yards, and then stopped suddenly, when all around it there was a fresh flashing out of the lights.

“Why, uncle!” cried Ned, “if we caught a lot of those and hung them up in a glass globe, we shouldn’t want this lamp.”

“I don’t know how the experiment would answer, Ned,” was the reply. “But it would be awkward to go plashing about in the mud and water to catch the fireflies, and we have no glass globe, while we have a lamp.”

The coruscations of the fireflies seemed to fascinate Ned so much that he became quite silent at last, while the Malays sat huddled together chewing their betel, and talking in a low subdued tone. Then Murray struck a match to light his pipe, and the flash showed Ned’s intent face.

“What’s the matter, boy?”

“I was trying to puzzle it out, uncle.”

“What?”

“Oh, there are three things,” said Ned, as the half-burned match described a curve and fell into the water to be extinguished with a hiss, looking as it flew something like one of the fireflies ashore, but of a ruddier tint.

“Well, philosopher,” said Murray, leaning over against the side of the boat, “let’s have some of your thoughts.”

“You’ll laugh at me.”

“No. Honour bright.”

"Well, uncle, first of all, I was wondering why those lights in the fireflies don't burn them."

"Easily answered, Ned; because they are not hot."

"But they seem to be burning like the flame in a lamp, only of course very small."

"Seem, Ned, but they are not burning. It's light without heat, the same as you see on decaying fish; and as we shall find in some of the great mushrooms in the jungle. It is one of the puzzles scientific men have not quite settled yet. We have it, you see, in our own glow-worms. I have often seen it in a kind of centipede at home, which to me seems to be covered with a kind of luminous oil, some of which it leaves behind it on a gravel path or the trunk of a tree."

"Yes; I've seen that," said Ned thoughtfully.

"Then, again, you have it on the sea-shore, where in calm, hot weather the luminosity looks like pale golden-green oil, so thick that you can skim it from a harbour."

"But what can it all be for?"

"Ah, there you pose me, Ned. What is everything for? What are we for?"

"To go up the river, and make all sorts of discoveries."

"A good answer. Then let's roll ourselves in our blankets and go to sleep. Hamet says that we shall start again before it is light, and they are going to sleep now."

"All right. Shall I make the beds?"

Murray laughed, for the bed-making consisted in taking two blankets out of a box, and then they rolled themselves up, the lamp was turned down, and, save for a few moments' rustling sound caused by Ned fidgeting into a fresh place, all was silent, the faint whisper of the water gliding by the side of the boat hardly warranting the term sound.

"Asleep, Ned?" came after a pause.

"No, uncle."

"Thinking?"

"Yes, uncle."

"What about?"

"I was thinking how horrid it would be if those people came stealing on board with their krises, and killed us all."

"Then don't think any more such absurd rubbish, and go to sleep."

"Yes, uncle."

"The people out there have just as much cause to fear that we should turn pirates, and go and attack them."

There was another pause, and then a fresh repetition of the questioning, and this time Ned had been thinking how easy it would be for Hamet and his companions to stab and drop them overboard.

"Get out, you horrible young imaginer of evil. If they did that they would not be paid for their journey."

"No, uncle, but they'd get the guns and all our things."

"Ned, I'm beginning to think I ought to have left you at home," said Mr Murray quietly.

"Oh, I say uncle, I couldn't help tumbling overboard."

"No, sir, but you can help putting all kinds of bloodthirsty ideas in my head. Now go to sleep."

"Well, uncle, if you'll promise not to believe you ought to have left me at home, I will not think anything like that again."

"Very well, sir. It's a bargain."

There was a long silence, and then, *ping—ing—ing—ing*, came a sharp, piercing trumpeting.

"Here he is, Ned."

"Who, uncle?"

"The fellow who wants to have our blood."

“Shall I get the guns, uncle?” whispered Ned, in awe-stricken tones.

“Bah! Nonsense! Whoever shot at a mosquito?”

“Mosquito! Oh, I say, what a shame to scare me like that.”

The insect came, filled himself full, and flew off replete; but somehow sleep would not come to either Ned or his uncle, and they were lying hot and weary longing for the repose, when they both started up, for from somewhere in the forest beyond the cottages came a deep-toned sound which can only be rendered by the word pow!

“What’s that, uncle?”

“Hist! talk in a whisper. It may be some kind of ape on the prowl; but I’m afraid—”

“So am I, uncle, horribly.”

“Be quiet, sir, and let me finish what I have to say,” cried Murray angrily. “I was going to say I’m afraid it’s a tiger.”

“Oh, I say, do get down the guns,” whispered Ned. “A tiger? And loose?”

“Loose? Why, you young donkey, do you think this is the zoological gardens, and the tiger’s cage has been left open?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure; only it seems very risky to be here like this, and not even able to shut the door. No—no—no—no, uncle,” continued Ned hastily; “you promised you would not think that you ought to have left me at home.”

At that moment the cry came again louder and nearer, but modified so that there could be no doubt about the animal that had given vent to the sound.

The knowledge that a tiger was prowling about somewhere near was enough to make Murray rise softly, and reach down one of the guns from the slings, and slip a couple of ball-cartridges into the barrels, and thus prepared he sat waiting, both having the consolation of knowing that if the animal attacked them, it could only be by taking to the water first and swimming to the boat.

The sound came again, exactly, as Ned said afterwards when he felt quite safe, like the cry of a magnified tom-cat.

But a couple of hours passed away without further alarm, and somewhere about that time Murray gave a start, for he had been fast asleep.

"Ned," he whispered.

A heavy breathing was his answer, and the next minute he too was fast asleep only to be awakened by the warm sun at last, and to find from Hamet that the boat had been cast off, and they had been rowing steadily up the river from the earliest dawn of day.

"Ned," said Murray. "Ned."

There was no answer, and he caught hold of the boy.

"Hi, uncle! quick! the gun! It's got hold of my arm."

"What has?"

"Oh, it's you," said Ned, with a sigh of relief. "I dreamed something seized me, and I didn't know whether it was a tiger or a croc."

Chapter Four.

Guests or Prisoners?

Five more days were passed ascending the river, which by degrees began to display banks that were park-like and densely packed with forest trees. The dismal mangroves had disappeared, and in their place graceful palms shot up and spread their feathered plumes; bamboos rose in clumps like gigantic grasses, and canes swung from branch to branch, and festooned specimens of timber which was often one blaze of colour, and whose petals sprinkled the now bright clear water.

A tiny village was passed at intervals, and from time to time some boat floated by them deeply laden with rice or tea. At night the boat was moored to some tree trunk. The men went ashore, and collected wood and lit a fire for cooking purposes, and then all returned to sleep on board before starting early in the cool misty morning, so as to have some hours' rest in the middle of the day, before the journey was resumed in the evening.

It was a calm and peaceful, even if it were a monotonous little voyage, for, in spite of some object worthy of a naturalist's attention being pointed out, Murray preferred to wait till he was farther on his way before commencing his collecting; and white-plumaged falcon and beautiful long-tailed kingfishers were allowed to fly by unmolested.

"Wait a bit, Ned," he said, "and you shall have your hands full."

The river was now beautiful. It was a broad clear stream, with mountains visible away to the east, wherever an opening occurred in the woods, and it seemed a wonder that so lovely a country should show so seldom that it was inhabited.

At the villages they passed, the people looked peaceful, quiet, and inoffensive, although every man carried a deadly-looking kris in its wooden sheath, thrust in the twisted-up band of the scarf-like silk or cotton sarong, which was wrapped round the middle in the form of a kilt, and with the exception of something worn in the shape of a hat to keep off the sun's piercing rays, this was the only garment many of the people displayed.

They brought fruit when asked, every house having its cluster of fruit-trees about it. In some cases there were cocoa-nuts, but more frequently bananas of two or three kinds, which they parted with for a mere trifle, these forming an admirable addition to the supply of food.

Hamet generally went to market, and came back smiling often enough with a large bunch of the finger-shaped fruit, a bag of rice, and when he was most fortunate in his foraging, a couple of skinny-looking chickens and some eggs.

"Getting tired, Ned?" said Murray, one glorious morning as the men were steadily rowing on, keeping close up to the trees on their right, for the sake of the shade and the slower motion of the stream.

"No, not tired," replied the boy. "It's all too beautiful for one to get tired, but I do feel as if I should like to be doing something. I keep seeing birds I want to shoot, and flowers I should like to pick."

"Then here's news for you, boy. I reckon that we are now well up into the region I wanted to explore, and to-morrow work shall begin in real earnest."

Ned's eyes sparkled. "Begin shooting?"

"Yes, and collecting botanical specimens. There will be no need now to toil up a certain distance every day, and we shall stop at every likely-looking collecting ground to go ashore, and certainly explore every side stream or creek."

"And fish? Hamet says it would be capital if I could catch enough fish for a dinner now and then; and I want to bathe."

"Of course, and you shall try; but there are crocodiles. I have seen two within the past hour, one swimming, and the other lying on a sandbank."

"Why, I saw that," cried Ned; "but it was so still that I concluded it was all fancy, it lay so close, and looked so like the sand and mud. Well, I may fish if I can't bathe, and—well, that does seem curious just as I said that. Look, there are two of the black fellows at it."

"A dark brown and a light brown to be more correct," said Murray, as he looked at a boat some fifty yards ahead of them, where it had just shot round a bend of the smooth stream, with a Malay boy paddling; while another in bright sarong and gay-looking baju or jacket, and a natty little military-looking cap on one side of his head, leaned back trailing a line for some kind of fish.

"I say, you sir," cried Ned loudly, as he noted that the brown-looking boy was about his own age, and that he was watching the newcomers eagerly, "what's the Malay for what you are catching, and how many have you caught?"

For answer the boy gave his line a snatch in, and let it go again, showing his teeth, and laughing heartily.

"Well, you might be civil," said Ned flushing. "I say, Hamet, ask him how many he has caught."

The boatman asked the required question, and received an answer in the Malay tongue.

"He says he has only just begun."

"Well, ask him what sort of fish he catches."

But before the question could be asked, the boy shouted something.

"He says, sahib, are you fond of fishing?"

"Yes, of course," shouted Ned, forgetful of the apparent need of an interpreter.

By this time, the boats had passed each other and the distance was increasing, when there came in good plain English: "I say, where are you going?"

"Up the river," cried Ned in astonishment. "Know any more English? Where do you live? How far is it away from here, and what's your name?"

The boy in the boat threw out his line again, and burst into a shout of laughter, greatly to Ned's annoyance, for it sounded derisive; but there was no opportunity for further attempts at communication, for their boat swept round the bend, and it was plain enough whence the fishers had come, for, beautifully situated in a lake-like curve of the stream, they could see quite a pretentious-looking village with what was evidently a mosque, and just beyond it, a strong-looking stockade. The houses were of exactly the same type as those they had before passed, but in addition there were several of considerable size, whose sides were woven in striking patterns, while dense groves of cocoa, betel, and nipah palms added to the beauty of the scene.

Along the shore a dozen or two of boats were drawn up, while floating alone and doubled in the mirror-like water was a large prahu on whose deck several men were lolling about. Just then a naga or dragon, boat came swiftly from behind it, propelled by a dozen men in yellow jackets and scarlet caps, and three or four showily-costumed Malays could be seen seated and standing in the shade of the awning, which, like that of their own boat, was of palm-leaves or attap, but far more neatly-made.

"What place is this, Hamet?"

"Don't know, sir," he said. "Never been so far. It must be Campong Bukit, and that is one of the rajah's boats."

"What rajah?"

"Rajah of Dah. Great prince."

"Ah, well, we may as well stop and land, and I daresay we can buy some fresh fruit and chickens and rice. What's that?"

"Ibrahim says don't stop—not good place," replied Hamet, for one of the men had whispered to him.

"Oh, but Mr Wilson said this was an important village, and that there were English people here."

The question of stopping or not was soon decided, for by a dexterous turn the dragon boat was swept across them, their way stopped, and one of the Malays beneath the awning shouted something imperiously to the men.

Hamet replied in Malay, while Murray strained his ears to try to pick up the meaning of some of the words, without success, and then turned impatiently to Hamet.

"What do they want?" he said.

"To know who you are, sir, and where you are going."

"Tell him to mind his own business," said Murray, sharply, and to Ned's great delight. "No; it would be uncivil. Tell him I am an English gentleman travelling for my pleasure, and that we are going to land to look at the place and buy provisions."

This was duly interpreted, a fresh answer made, and permission given, the naga being kept close alongside as they all rowed for what proved to be quite a respectable landing-place, that is to say, a roughly-made jetty formed by driving bamboos into the sand and mud.

"Ask him if there are not some English people here," said Murray to Hamet.

"No, uncle, don't. Look there, in front of those trees, there's an Englishman with a white umbrella, and a lady with a parasol. Oh, I say, what a shame; she's using an opera-glass—and you said we were coming up into quite a savage place."

"So I did, Ned," said his uncle, rubbing his ear; "but I can't help it. Civilisation crops up everywhere now, and they say you can't get away from cotton prints and Staffordshire pottery without running up against Sheffield knives."

"But it is so disappointing. I say, look, and there's another lady, and they're going on to that jetty to see us come in. There'll be a steamboat call next, and I daresay there's a railway station somewhere among the trees."

"Never mind, Ned," said Murray, with a comical look of chagrin in his countenance. "We'll only buy what we can and be off again directly. I certainly didn't expect this. Why, there's

another Englishman," he said, more loudly than he had intended, for they were close up to the jetty now, and the man of whom he had spoken, a red-faced youngish fellow in flannel shirt and trousers and a straw hat, said loudly:

"Not a bad shot, sor. Make it Oirish, and ye'll be right."

"I beg your pardon," cried Murray, hastily raising his hat, and the salute was returned. "What place is this?"

"Dirthy Bucket, sor. Campong Bukit they call it. Are ye from home lately?"

"From England? Yes."

All this was said as the boat glided along by the bamboo posts, and Murray added hastily: "Perhaps you would not mind helping us. We want to buy some provisions—something to eat."

"Buy something to ate?" said the man, smiling. "Whisht, here's the masther and the ladies.—Here's an English gentleman, sor."

There was rather an angry buzzing here from the dragon boat, as the gentleman with the white umbrella came on to the jetty, the two ladies with him remaining behind, while quite a little crowd of Malays began to collect on the river-bank.

"English gentleman?" said the newcomer. "Glad to see you, sir. From Singapore, I presume!"

"Not just lately; we have been staying at Dindong. We were on our way up the river, and this place seemed a likely one to lay in a store of fresh provisions. Am I right?"

"Perfectly. Come ashore, my dear sir. Your son?"

"Nephew," replied Murray, and Ned bowed stiffly.

"Just as welcome in this savage place. This way; my bungalow is a very little way off."

"But my boat, guns, and the like?"

"Be safe? Tim, jump in and take charge, while the gentlemen come up to tiffin."

"But, sor, there'll be nobody to—"

“Oh, never mind; we’ll manage. My factotum, butler, footman, groom, everything,” continued the stranger. “Did those fellows bring you in?”

“Not exactly. They showed us the way.”

“Hem!” said the stranger, with a dry cough; and he put up his white umbrella again. “Mind the sun?”

“Oh, no; we are getting a bit acclimatised.”

“You’re lucky then; I’m not. My dears, gentlemen from home. Mr—Mr—?”

“Murray.”

“Mr Murray. My wife and daughter. Oh, by the way, forgot to introduce myself: Barnes, Doctor Barnes, resident physician to His Highness the Rajah of Dah, in whose capital you stand. My dear, Mr Murray and his nephew have kindly consented to take tiffin with us.”

“You are very kind,” said Murray, hesitating.

“No apologies are necessary,” said the elder of the two ladies, rather a yellow, quick-spoken body; and she made as if to take the newcomer’s arm. “We are only too glad to see a fresh face—a white one, are we not, Amy?”

“Indeed we are, mamma,” said the bright-looking girl addressed, and in a half-amused way, she took Ned’s arm as her father went on in front.

“I little thought of seeing English visitors,” she continued. “Shall I be impertinent if I ask why you have come so far?”

“Oh no!” said Ned rather brusquely, for he resented the questioning. “Uncle and I have come up on a sporting and natural history trip. We are going on directly.”

“Indeed! Then the rajah has given you leave?”

“What rajah? The man here?”

“Yes,” said the girl, smiling.

“Oh no! We did not know it was necessary. Uncle will ask him then, I suppose. Does he call it his property?”

The girl looked round at him in surprise,—

"Oh yes; he is the rajah or prince of the country."

"Yes; but I thought all this belonged to the Queen."

"Well, I suppose it does, but our prince here thinks he is as important a person as the queen of England, and does exactly as he likes."

"Oh!"

"You must recollect that we are a very very long way from Singapore here, and, excepting what he has been told of England and her power, the rajah knows very little about our country, and laughs at my father as if he were telling him romances when he talks of our army and ships of war."

"He must be awfully conceited, then."

"He is," said the girl laughing. "I believe he thinks he is the greatest monarch upon earth."

"Then you are the only English people here?"

"Oh no. We have Mr and Mrs Braine and their son, and Mr and Mrs Greig."

"Who are they?"

"Mr Braine is a gentleman papa recommended to the rajah. He wanted some one to advise him and help him to introduce English customs, and to drill his army. Mr Greig is a merchant who lives here to purchase the produce of the country to send down to Singapore. You will see them, I daresay, for they are sure to come in as soon as they know that you are here."

"It all seems very funny. I thought we were coming into quite a wild place where there were elephants and tigers, and great snakes and birds that we could collect."

"Well, it could not be much more wild," said the girl, smiling. "Directly you get past our house the dense jungle begins. We are completely shut in by it, except in the front here by the river. Wild? You will hear the tigers as soon as it is dark."

"But I shall not be here," said Ned, laughing.

"I think you will," said the girl, looking at him curiously.

"Oh no; my uncle has quite made up his mind about what he intends to do, and nothing can change him."

"Indeed! We shall see. Here we are."

They had been passing through the place with its houses dotted about in the most irregular fashion, just as the builders had felt disposed to plant them, and now came upon an attractive-looking bungalow similar in character to the others, and like them raised on bamboo piles seven or eight feet from the ground, but with numberless little additions such as would be made by an Englishman. Notably a high rustic fence enclosing a large garden planted liberally with tropic shrubs and flowers, and a broad flight of steps leading up to a great open verandah which ran nearly along the whole of the front, and over which the attap roof was brought to rest on clusters of bamboo formed into pillars, up which ran and twined in profuse growth passion-flowers and other creepers.

"What a delightful place!" cried Ned. "Why, it's quite a treat to see a good garden. Look at the fruit!"

"Mamma is very proud of the garden, and—"

"Come along, squire," said the doctor, from the head of the steps. "Welcome to the Fernery."

Murray was already seated at a well-spread table, upon which a couple of Malayan women, in neat cotton sarongs woven into an attractive plaid, were placing plates and dishes, and they greeted the newcomers with a look of surprise and a smile.

"There, gentlemen," said the doctor, "you could not have arrived at a more opportune time, but you must excuse all shortcomings. We keep up old English customs as well as we can, and can give you coffee and eggs. No fried bacon, squire," he added laughingly to Ned. "You are where our genial useful old friend the pig is an abomination. Why, it's five years since I've tasted a sausage, or a bit of ham. But we can give you a curry of which I am proud. Eh, my dear?"

"Mr Murray will let a hearty English welcome make up for anything lacking," said the doctor's lady. "He knows that we are in the wilderness."

"A wilderness with bamboo chairs, a table, a clean cloth, glass, plate, napkins, and flowers and fruit," cried Murray. "Why, my dear madam, you forget that we have been picnicking in a boat. There, don't spoil your welcome by apologies!"

Then there was a busy interval during which the greatest justice was done to an excellent meal, and Ned was initiated into the mystery of sambals—tiny saucers of pickle-like and preserve preparations, popular amongst the Malays as appetisers, but quite needless in Ned's case, for he was perfectly independent of anything of the kind, and after his curry and coffee, now the first chill of strangeness had passed, paid plenty of attention to the fruit pressed upon him by the doctor's daughter. Now it was a deliciously-flavoured choice banana with a deep orange skin, now a mangosteen, and then a portion of a great durian, a scrap or two of which he ate with some reluctance.

"Hallo!" said the doctor after a glance at his daughter, "you are not getting on with your durian, sir. Pray take some more; it is our king among fruits."

"I—I am afraid it is not a good one," stammered Ned, looking rather red.

"Eh? not a good one?" cried the doctor, tasting a piece. "Delicious, just in perfect condition. Ah, you have to acquire that taste. Now then, the ladies will excuse us, and we'll have a cigar here in the shade."

He clapped his hands, and one of the Malay women brought a box of manillas.

"No, I don't think I'll smoke," said Murray. "You will not think me rude, but if you will excuse us, and put us in the way of getting what we want, I should be grateful."

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "you must see our other English residents. They are only waiting to give us time to finish our meal, and really you cannot go as yet."

"Indeed!" said Murray, smiling, and noticing that the ladies both looked serious.

"Well, you see," said the doctor rather confusedly—"do pray light a cigar, I'll set you an example—you see there is the rajah."

Ned looked up sharply at the doctor, and then darted a look of intelligence at his daughter.

"What about him?" said Murray abruptly.

"Well, you see," said the doctor, hesitatingly, "he might think—but you are going shooting and collecting, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, you ought to ask his permission."

"What!" said Murray, laughing. "My dear sir, you talk as if this were a gentleman's estate, and he kept gamekeepers."

"Well, yes," said the doctor, smiling; "it is so on a large scale."

"How far does it extend? We will not begin shooting till we are quite beyond his patch."

"How far?" said the doctor thoughtfully. "Ah, that is a difficult question to answer. It was hard to say before the late encounters with the Rajah of Padang; now the territory is more than doubled. I think you had better send in a request. Ah, here is Braine!"

"And Mrs Braine and Mr Greig," added the doctor's lady, rising from her chair.

This ended the conversation, just when Ned saw that his uncle was growing annoyed at the doctor's opposition to his plans, and he glanced round to see that his neighbour was looking at him intently.

"I thought you would not be able to go away to-day," she whispered, as she rose and went with her mother to meet the visitors at the foot of the steps, the doctor having made an apology and gone too.

"What did that young lady say to you, Ned?" said his uncle in a low tone.

"She thought there would be some difficulty in our going on to-day."

"Oh, nonsense! These people lead an idle life, and they want every one they see to stop and play with them. I don't want to

be rude, but we are not going to dawdle about here; and as for this petty chief—all rubbish!”

At that moment a tall stern-looking man, in loose white clothes and a pith helmet, came up the steps. His face was darkened almost to the tint of a Malay’s, and he had a quick anxious look in his eyes, which, with his rather hollow cheeks, gave him the aspect of one who had lately been ill. He advanced with open hand.

“Glad to meet you, Mr Murray,” he said. “It is a pleasure to see a countryman.”

“That speech will do for me too,” said a rather harsh voice, and a keen-looking gentleman of about fifty, with his face deeply lined and a quick expression and manner which at once stamped him as shrewd, now shook hands warmly with the new arrivals, while directly after a subdued, handsome-looking woman was led up by the doctor’s lady.

“Let me introduce you two,” said the hostess. “Mrs Braine is an ardent botanist, Mr Murray, and I’m sure that you will enjoy a chat together. She knows all our flowering plants here by heart.”

“I am very pleased to meet Mr Murray,” said the newcomer in a sweet sad voice. “I hope he will let me be his guide to some of the nooks on the river-bank, where the jungle can be penetrated.”

“I should only be too glad, my dear madam,” said Murray; “and I can find no words to express my thanks—our thanks, I should say—for your cordial reception here of a perfect stranger; but my nephew and I have only put in to buy a bag of rice and some fruit to replenish our stores, and we are going on directly.”

Murray ceased speaking, and looked sharply from one to the other, for he had seen Mr Braine raise his eyebrows and glance at the doctor and the shrewd keen-looking man. The doctor laughed, and took up the cigar box.

“Have a smoke, Braine?” he said.

“Thanks,” was the reply; and the newcomer took a cheroot in the midst of a rather constrained silence.

“I hope I have not said anything wrong,” continued Murray, who felt piqued at the manners of those about him, for the ladies began talking together in a subdued tone.

“Oh dear me, no!” said Mr Braine hastily. “You are shooting and collecting, I think?”

“We have not begun yet,” replied Murray, quickly; “but that is why we have come.”

There was another pause.

“I am afraid you will give me the credit of being somewhat of a bear,” continued Murray, “and really, Doctor Barnes, I am most grateful to you and your charming wife and daughter for your hospitality.”

“Oh, pray, say no more,” said Mrs Barnes. “You confer a favour on us by coming, though you have given us no English news as yet.”

“And I am afraid, my dear madam, that I shall have time to give you very little. At the risk of being considered rude, I must ask you to excuse us now.”

The doctor frowned and looked at Mr Braine, who glanced in turn at the shrewd elderly man, and he immediately searched for a silver snuff-box, and then spent a great deal of time over taking a pinch.

“Really, gentlemen,” said Murray, quickly, “all this is very strange. I can hardly think you credit me with rudeness in being hurried.”

“Oh no, Mr Murray, not at all,” said the doctor’s lady.—“Mr Braine, why do you not explain?”

“Well, really,” said that gentleman, “I thought an explanation should come from you as the host and hostess, but I will do my best.—The fact is, Mr Murray, this country is something like the west coast of Scotland in the old days, when every chief had his stronghold.”

“Oh yes, I have noted that,” said Murray, smiling; “and I see that they have both the plaid and dirk, though you call them sarong and kris.”

"Exactly. Well, my dear sir, the chief, rajah, prince, or whatever you like to call him, is omnipotent here."

"Not always, Mr Braine," said the doctor's lady, merrily. "I think my husband rules over the rajah."

"Only when he is ill, my dear, and he is the most refractory patient I ever had."

"And you see there is a certain etiquette to be observed here," continued Mr Braine. "We would do everything we could to help you to procure your provisions, and say God speed to your journey, but we are helpless."

"Indeed!" said Murray, flushing. "You mean that as we have come we must ask the rajah's permission to go: I shall do nothing of the kind. Gentlemen, we will start at once."

Mr Braine made a deprecatory sign,—

"Excuse me," he said. "You speak like one of us—like an Englishman, but my good sir, this is not England, and we are beyond the range of the law courts and the police. I say this is not England, nor is it Singapore. We are not many hundred miles from where the English rule is well in force, but here, to all intents and purposes, we are completely in the power of a barbarous chief."

"But this is absurd!" cried Murray; "surely the Governor of the Straits Settlements would crush out any piece of oppression directly, or any outrage on a British subject."

Mr Braine smiled.

"The British lion is very strong, sir," he said; "but he is well fed and drowsy. He knows that he has only to lift his paw, or perhaps only to lash his tail, to get rid of troublesome animals or stinging insects, but it is very hard to get him to do this. No doubt if Rajah Sadi were to behave very badly, the war-steamer on the station here would come up the river as far as she could, and then send an expedition in boats with plenty of jacks and marines, and perhaps a few soldiers, but not until there had been a great deal of red-tape unwound, declarations sent to and from London, and perhaps a year would have passed before the help came. Then the rajah would be punished, if they could catch him, and his stockade and village be burned. But most probably he would know from his people when the expedition was coming, and mount his elephants with his court, and go

right away into the jungle, after sending his prahus and other boats up one of the side-streams where they could hide. Then the expedition would return and so would the rajah; the bamboo houses would be rebuilt, and matters go on just as before."

"You are making out a very bad case, sir," said Murray, biting his lip to keep down his annoyance, "but I shall not hesitate as to my plans."

"You mean that you will go on at once?"

"Certainly," said Murray; "and let them try to stop us if they dare."

"Humph!" said Mr Braine, raising his brows a little. "You doubt then the likelihood of the rajah's people interfering with you?"

"Excuse me for seeming rude to you in my incredulity, but I do doubt this."

Mr Braine smiled again.

"I presume," he said, "that when your boat came up you were boarded by the rajah's naga."

"Yes."

"And you saw that she had a well-armed crew?"

"I noticed that the men all wore their krises, and that spears were hanging in slings from the covered-in part."

"Exactly. That boat boards every vessel that goes up or down the river, and all pay tax or toll to the lord of this district, and have to await his permission before they can stir."

"Then," said Murray, sharply, "you consider that we are prisoners?"

"No; I do not go so far as that, but you are in the realm of a petty independent prince, who is something of a despot, and for your own sake you must submit to the customs of the country."

"But this is ridiculous!" cried Murray, angrily. "Ladies, forgive me for being so abrupt, but people from the old country resent coercion in every form. I'll be as polite to your rajah as a gentleman should be, but I am not going to have my plans

upset by a savage. Ned, my lad, we'll see if they dare interfere with us."

"I beg you will do nothing rashly," said Mr Braine, for Murray took a step toward the ladies, and held out his hand smilingly.

"Good-bye," he said frankly. "I am going some distance up the river, but I hope you will let me make your acquaintance again on our return."

"You are not gone yet, Mr Murray," said the doctor, shortly; "and I advise you, sir, to practise prudence for both your sakes. As I expected, here are the rajah's people; I thought that they would not be long."

Chapter Five.

Before the Rajah.

At the same moment that the doctor was speaking, Ned had caught sight of something glittering in the sun above the green shrubs that bordered the bamboo fence, and directly after that there was quite a blaze of yellow and scarlet colour as a party of Malays reached the gate and entered the grounds, a little group of swarthy-looking spearmen halting in the path, while two stately-looking men, with handkerchiefs tied turban fashion about their heads, came slowly up to the steps. The doctor descended to meet them, and then ushered them into the verandah where they saluted the ladies courteously, and then bowed gravely to the strangers, to whom they were introduced as two of the chief officers of the rajah in the most formal way; after which, as a brief conversation took place in the Malay tongue, and gave Ned the opportunity to examine their silken jackets and gay kilt-like sarongs in which were stuck their krises with the handles covered by the twisted folds, the doctor turned to Murray.

"These gentlemen," he said, "have been sent by his highness the rajah to ask why you have come here, and to desire your presence before him."

"Tell them," said Murray, "that I am sorry I cannot speak their tongue; and that as I am going on at once, I beg the rajah will excuse me from waiting upon him."

“My dear sir,” whispered Mr Braine; but Murray flushed a little, and went on:

“Tell the rajah, please, that I am an English gentleman, a subject of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, travelling with my nephew to collect objects of natural history, and that I shall be obliged if he will give me a safe conduct to pass through his country unmolested by his people.”

An answer to this was made at once by the elder and more grave-looking of the two Malays, showing that, though he spoke in his own language to the doctor, he had comprehended every word that had been said.

The doctor listened, and then interpreted again to Murray.

“The Tumongong desires me to say that he is sure his highness will be glad to further your wishes, but that he dare not go back and deliver such a message. You will excuse me for saying so, Mr Murray, but you must obey, and at once.”

“And suppose I refuse, sir?” said Murray, warmly. “British gentlemen are not accustomed to be told that they must.”

“No,” said the doctor, smiling, “and do not like it; but there are times when Englishmen and Scotchmen find that they must submit to circumstances—eh, Braine?—eh, Greig?”

“Oh yes,” said the merchant, taking out his snuff-box, opening it, and offering it to each of the Malay gentlemen, who bowed gravely, and took a pinch.

“It is not pleasant, I know, sir,” said Mr Braine quietly; “but may I, as a fellow-countryman, offer you a little advice?”

“Of course.”

“Then pray go, sir. And, excuse me for saying, it would be uncourteous not to obey the summons. Vous parlez Français?” he added quietly.

“Yes, badly.”

“Croyez moi: il faut.”

Ned noticed a slight twitching of the Tumongong’s facial muscles, and an intent look in his eyes, as if he were trying to understand the last words, which puzzled him.

“I am at his highness’s service,” said Murray, abruptly. “Come Ned, you may as well come too.”

The chief officer smiled gravely, and placed himself beside Murray, his companion following his example, and walking up to Ned. Then they both bowed politely to the ladies, and signed to the visitors to go toward the steps.

“You are coming, then?” said Murray, as he saw Mr Braine step forward.

“I? Oh yes. You will want an interpreter,” said the gentleman addressed.

“Excuse me a moment,” said Murray, addressing the Malay chief.—“Ladies, I’ll say good-bye once more, and thank you heartily for your kindness to us.”

“You can do that later on,” said the doctor, quietly. “If you do go to-day, of course we shall come and see you off.”

“To be sure. Thank you,” said Murray smiling.—“Now, gentlemen, I am at your service. I see that you speak English.”

“Understand? yes,” said the chief officer; “speak? no.”

By this time they were in the garden, the group of swarthy spearmen standing back in line with military precision, and holding their weapons at the salute as the party passed them, and then falling in behind to march after them in a way which showed that they had been carefully drilled.

“Come, Ned,” said Murray, as they passed out of the gate, “don’t look so serious, lad; they are not leading us out to execution.”

“Did I look serious, uncle?” said the boy merrily. “I was not thinking that, but of our clothes.”

“Eh, what about them, lad?”

“That they look very rough and shabby beside these grand dresses. We hardly seem lit to go to court.”

“Not our fault, boy. It is a special invitation,” replied Murray merrily.—“We must study up the Malay language so as to be independent, Mr Braine.”

"I should advise you to master it as soon as you can," said that gentleman, who was now walking beside them as they threaded their way in and out among the houses, where every now and then they could catch a glimpse of a pair of eyes watching them, though the people they passed took not the slightest notice of them, or just glanced, turned their betel-nut in their mouths, and went on chewing it with their eyes half-closed, as if the coming of strangers was not of the slightest importance to them.

"Is it far to the palace?" asked Murray, giving Ned a quaint look.

"Just beyond those houses, and amongst the group of trees you can see over their roofs," said Mr Braine; and he then turned and spoke to the officers, who replied to him in Malay.

"His highness is waiting to give you audience," he continued. "Mr Murray, I do not like to force advice upon a stranger, but I should like to say, for your own sake and that of your young friend, try to accept the position in which you find yourself, however hard it may be. And," he added in a whisper, looking sharply at Ned, "whatever you see, do not laugh. Eastern gentlemen are extremely sensitive to ridicule."

"I shall not laugh," said Ned quietly; and then he began thinking about the punctilious ways of his companions till they had passed the last houses, entered a patch of forest, and from that came suddenly upon a clearing where a spacious bamboo house stood half hidden by a clump of umbrageous trees, beneath one of which was drawn up a group which at the first glance made the boy wonder whether he was gazing at a scene in real life, or some imaginary picture from an eastern tale.

The first figure upon which Ned's eyes rested was seated in the centre of the group, on a quaintly made stool, and his gorgeous dress immediately suggested that this must be the great man himself whom they had come to see. For he was evidently got up expressly for the occasion, with his courtiers carefully arranged about him, some standing behind and on either side, but for the most part squatted down on the sandy ground in the position affected by eastern people, though here and there one could be seen right down cross-legged *à la turque*.

The rajah was the only one in European costume, and at the first glance at the man, with his heavy fat sensual-looking face and lurid eyes, Ned recalled his companion's words: "Whatever you see, do not laugh."

He felt at once the value of the advice, as his eye ran over the chief's costume, for he was gorgeously arrayed in a military tunic and trousers undoubtedly made in London to order, the tailor having had instructions to prepare for his highness a dress that would be striking and impressive, and from this point of view he had done his work well. The trousers were blue with gold stripes, of the most elaborate floral pattern, such as decorate levee uniforms; and, after the fashion of our most gaily-dressed hussars of fifty years ago, there were wonderful specimens of embroidery part of the way down the front of the thigh. But the tunic was the dazzling part of the show, for it was of the regular military scarlet, and was neither that of field-marshal, dragoon, nor hussar, but a combination of all three, frogged, roped, and embroidered in gold, and furnished with a magnificent pair of twisted epaulets. Across the breast was a gorgeous belt, one mass of gold ornamentation, while the sword-belt and slings were similarly encrusted, and the sabre and sheath—carefully placed between his legs, so that it could be seen to the best advantage—was a splendid specimen of the goldsmiths' and sword-cutlers' art, and would have been greatly admired in a museum. To complete the effect, the rajah wore an Astrakan busby, surmounted by a tall scarlet egret-plume, similar to that worn by a horse-artillery officer of the British army, the cap being corded, starred, and held in place by a golden chain cheek-strap.

The effect ought to have been most striking, and so it was in one way; but it was spoiled by the presence of a jetty-black Malay attendant, dressed in an ordinary dark paletôt and military-looking cap, holding over the rajah's head a white sun umbrella of common cotton, and the fact patent to any Englishman, that the uniform must have been ordered without the customary visit to the tailor, the result destroying everything with the horribly striking truth that it did not fit!

Ned bit his tongue hard, and gazed to right and left at the swarthy courtiers of the monarch, six of whom were squatted down in the front row, some in little military caps, others in brilliant kerchiefs tied turban fashion about their heads, and all wearing brilliant silken sarongs. These were the rajah's sword-bearers, and each held by the ornamental sheath a kris or parang of singular workmanship, with the hilt resting against the right shoulder. The rest of the rajah's people were picturesquely arranged, and in their native dress looked to a man far better than their ruler, who was the incongruous spot in the group, which was impressive enough to an English lad, with its lurid fierce-looking faces and dark oily eyes peering from the

mass of yellow and scarlet, while everywhere, though with the hilt covered by the folds of the sarong, could be made out the fact that each man carried at his waist a deadly-looking kris.

All this was seen at a glance as they advanced, and Ned had thoroughly crushed down the desire to laugh at the dark potentate, when his uncle nearly made him explode by whispering: "Make your fortune, Ned. Buy the whole party for Madame Tussaud's."

He was saved from a horrible breach of court etiquette by the two officials advancing, bowing low to the rajah, and making a short speech to his highness, who nodded and scowled while the guard of spearmen formed up in a row behind, and Mr Braine saluted in military fashion, and went and stood half behind at the rajah's left elbow, listened to something the great man said, and then looked at the two visitors.

"His highness bids me say that you are welcome to his court."

"We thank his highness," said Murray, frankly. Then to Ned: "Do as I do;" and he advanced and held out his hand.

There was a slight movement amongst the sword-bearers and officials, and a dozen fierce-looking men seemed ready to spring forward at this display of equality. But the rajah did not resent it; he smiled, rose, and took the extended hands in turn, making his plume vibrate and his busby topple forward, so that it dropped right off, and would have fallen in the dust but for the activity of Ned. He caught it and returned it to the wearer, who frowned with annoyance as he replaced it in its proper position.

"Dank you," he said, quite surlily, and he shook hands now. "How der doo?"

This last word was prolonged with quite a growl.

"Quite well, and glad to pay our compliments to your highness," said Murray.

The rajah's brow puckered, and he stared heavily, first at his visitors and then at Mr Braine, for he had reached the end of his English.

That individual came to his rescue, however, and after a few formal compliments had passed, with the people all listening in

stolid silence, Murray requested through his interpreter permission to pass on through the rajah's country.

This brought forth a series of questions as to what the visitors would collect, and answers respecting birds, animals, and plants.

The rajah listened to the answers, and then said something eagerly to Mr Braine.

"His highness wishes to know if you understand anything about minerals and metals," said the latter.

"Yes, I have made mineralogy and geology something of a study," replied Murray; and this being interpreted, the rajah spoke again for some little time with more animation than might have been expected from so heavy and dull a man.

"I'm getting tired of this, Ned," whispered Murray.

"Oh, it's worth seeing, uncle. It will be something to talk about when we get home."

"Yes, boy; but I want nature, not art of this kind."

"Mr Murray," said their interpreter just then, after clearing his voice with a cough, as if to get rid of something which tickled his throat, and drawing him and Ned aside, "his highness desires me to say that he, is very glad to welcome to his court so eminent a naturalist."

"My dear Mr Braine," said Murray, interrupting, "we are fellow-countrymen. Never mind the flowery part; let's have the plain English of it all."

"My dear fellow, I am translating almost verbatim. His highness says that he has long wished to see a gentleman of your attainments, for he is anxious to have his country explored, so that the valuable metals, precious stones, and vegetable productions may be discovered. He says that you are very welcome, and that a house shall be placed at your disposal, with slaves and guards and elephants for expeditions through the jungle to the mountains. One of his dragon boats will also be placed at your service for expeditions up the river, and he wishes you every success in the discoveries you will make for him."

"For him!" said Murray, looking bewildered; "but I want to make them for myself, and for the institutions with which I am connected in London."

"Yes; it is very awkward," said Mr Braine.

"Tell him I am highly flattered, but I must go on to-day.—Well, go on: speak to him."

"I cannot. I dare not."

"Then I will."

"But you can't; you do not know his language."

"Then I'll show him in pantomime."

"My dear sir, pray do nothing rash. I understand this chief and his people. You are quite strange to their ways. I beg you for your own sakes to accept the position."

"But it is making prisoners of us, sir. English people are not accustomed to such treatment. I will not be forced to stay."

"My dear Mr Murray, you are losing your temper," said Mr Braine. "Just let me, as a man of some experience out here, remind you of what, in cooler moments, you must know: I mean the necessity for being diplomatic with eastern people. Now pray look here. I know how annoying all this is; but on the other hand, you will have facilities for carrying on your researches such as you could not create for yourself."

"Yes; but I do not like to be forced."

"I know that. It is most objectionable."

"And I see through him as plainly as can be: he wants me to find out gold, or tin and precious stones, and other things for his benefit. It is degrading to a scientific man."

"You are perfectly right; but I must speak plainly. This man has perfect confidence in his own power, and he rules here like the Czar of Russia. My dear sir, be guided by me. You have no alternative. You cannot leave here, and he will have no hesitation whatever in imprisoning you if you refuse. Come, accept his proposal with a good grace, for your own and your nephew's sake—I may add for the sake of the follow country-folk you have met here to-day."

"But my good sir," said Murray angrily, "this idea of forcing me makes me the more indignant and obstinate."

"Yes; but forget all that in the cause of science."

Murray smiled.

"You are a clever diplomat, Mr Braine," he said. "Well I give way, for, as you say, there is no alternative."

"That's right," said Mr Braine eagerly, "and I hope you will not regret it. There, the rajah is growing impatient. He must not think you have spoken like this. I shall tell him that you have been stipulating for abundance of help."

"I do stipulate for that."

"And freedom to pursue your investigations in every direction."

"Yes; I stipulate for that too."

For some time past the rajah had been frowning, and loosening his sabre in its scabbard and clapping it down again, while Ned noticed that, as if anticipating an unpleasant reminder of their master's anger, the people right and left squatted and stood like statues, gazing straight before them. But when Mr Braine left the two strangers, and went back to the fierce-looking chief and made a long communication, which he had dressed up so as to gloss over the long consultation and Murray's defiant manner, the rajah's face lit up, and showed his satisfaction, the courtiers and attendants relaxed, and began to chew their betel. Ned even thought he heard a faint sigh of relief rise from the group, as Mr Braine bowed and returned to where the newcomers were standing.

"You have acted very wisely, Mr Murray," he said. "Come now, his highness wishes to speak to you."

Murray could hardly crush down the feeling of resentment which troubled him, but he walked up with Ned quietly enough, and stood waiting and trying to attach a meaning to the words which the rajah said, feeling how valuable some knowledge of the language would be, and hardly hearing Mr Braine's interpretation.

"His highness bids me say that he will be most happy to meet your wishes with respect to accommodation, and freedom to explore."

The rajah spoke again.

"And that boats, elephants, and men to clear a path through the jungle, are to be at your service."

There was another speech in Malay, which Mr Braine did not interpret, apparently for the reason that the rajah now rose from his stool, and took a step forward to tap both Murray and Ned on the shoulder, standing looking from one to the other, and rolling his great quid of betel-nut in his cheeks as he tried to recall something he wanted to say.

At last a smile came upon his heavy features.

"Goooood—boyahs," he said thickly. Then, drawing himself up, he stood fast, holding the scabbard of his sword in his left hand, threw his right over and grasped the hilt, and then in strict military fashion evidently, as he had been drilled by an instructor, he drew his sword, saluted, replaced the blade, faced to the right, marched a dozen paces; faced to the right again, and marched toward his bamboo and palm palace, the loose fit of his tunic and the bagginess of his trousers showing off to the worst advantage, till he was covered by his followers, who also marched after him mechanically, sword-bearers, men carrying a golden betel-box and golden spittoon, courtiers, and spearmen. At last all were either in or close up to the house, only the two Malay chiefs, who had fetched the strangers from the doctor's bungalow, remaining behind.

These two came up to them smiling in the most friendly way, just as Murray said: "What about our boat and the men?"

"Oh, they will be all right," replied Mr Braine.

"But the men? Am I to send them back?"

"No; his highness desires that they stay."

Just then the chief who had been spoken of as the Tumongong—a kind of chief counsellor—made some remark to Mr Braine, who nodded.

"These gentlemen," he said, "wish me to say that they hope we shall all be very good friends, and that they will see the rajah's wishes carried out as to your comfort."

"And our guns and things in the boat?"

The Tumongong spoke at once.

"You are not to make yourself uneasy. Everything will be right."

Then profound salaams were exchanged, and the Malays went toward the rajah's house, while the Englishmen took the way that led to the doctor's.

"I am beaten, Mr Braine," said Murray, rather bitterly. "I said I would go."

"You have acted very wisely, sir."

"Humph! Well, perhaps so," said Murray, rather gruffly. "Here we are then, Ned: prisoners in the cause of science we'll call it.—But it seems to me, Mr Braine, that if we do not mind our P's and Q's, we shall be prisoners indeed."

Mr Braine made no reply, but his looks seemed to endorse the other's words.

Chapter Six.

Making the best of it.

"Ned," said Mr Murray, as they reached the doctor's, "run and tell the boatmen we are going to stay," and Ned started off.

The boatmen did not seem in the least degree surprised upon Ned announcing to them that they were to stay for the present. "It is kismet—fate," said Hamet, calmly.

"I could have told ye that before," said a voice; and, looking up, Ned saw the good-humoured sun-browned face of the Irishman just projecting over the edge of the bamboo jetty, where he lay upon his chest smoking a pipe.

"Hullo! I'd forgotten you," said Ned, who had come down very thoughtful and dull.

"Faix, and I hadn't forgotten you. Didn't ye tell me to mind your duds and things in the boat, sor?"

"They did; I didn't. I say, if you knew that we should stay, why didn't you— But never mind."

The man gave him a droll look.

“There ye needn’t mind spaking out,” he said. “I know. The old ’un won’t let ye go away again.”

“You know him?” said Ned excitedly.

“Av course I do. He niver lets any one go that he wants to stay.”

“Then why didn’t you, an Englishman—Irishman, I mean—”

“That’s better, sor, though any one would hardly know me for an Irishman by my spache. Sure there are times when I haven’t a bit of brogue left. It’s the sun dhries it out of me, I think.”

“But why didn’t you warn us?”

“Because there’d a been a regular shaloo if I had. The other gintleman would have told your men here to pull away, and the dhragon boat would have been afther ye shying shpears, and you’d have been shuting, and the end would have been that ye’d been hurt; and think o’ that now.”

“But we should have rowed right away.”

“Divil a bit. They’d soon have caught ye or been firing their brass lalys at yez.”

“What’s a brass laly?” said Ned.

“Get out wid ye, sor: poking fun at me. Who said a wurrud about lalys? I said lalys.”

“Well, so did I.”

“Not a bit of it; ye said lalys.”

“So did you.”

“Not I. I said laly.”

“Spell it then.”

“Is it shpell it. Well then, l-e-l-a-h, laly. It’s a big brass blunderbush thing on a shwivel. There’s two of ’em on each of their prahus, and they send a ball about two pound-weight sometimes, and other times a couple o’ handfuls of old bits o’

broken iron, and nubbles o' tin, and shtones. Annythin whin they're spiteful."

"But do you mean to say they'd have dared to fire at a boat with two Englishmen in it—I mean a man and a boy?" cried Ned, flushing.

"Oh, don't go aiting yer wurruds like that, lad. Shure ye've got the sperret of a man in ye, if ye're not shix feet high. An' is it fire at a boat with Englishmen in it? Why, I belave they'd shute at one with Irishmen in, and I can't say more than that."

"Then we've rowed right into a nest of Malay pirates?"

"Oh no. You people at home might call 'em so, perhaps, but the old un's jist a rale Malay gintleman—a rajah as lives here in his own country, and takes toll of iverything that goes up and down. Sure, we do it at home; only gintalely, and call it taxes and rates and customs. And they've got customs of the country here."

"But, I say," said Ned, as he found that he was getting a deeper insight into their position, "the rajah will soon let us go?"

"Will he?"

"Come, answer me. How long will he want us to stay?"

"Oh, for iver, I should say, or as much of it as ye can conthrive to live."

"You're making fun of me," said Ned, frowning. "But look here; you are not prisoners."

"Prishoners? No. Isn't the masther the rajah's owen chief docthor, and Mr Braine his prime-minister, field-marshal, and commander-in-chief."

"Then you people could go when you liked?"

"Oh no. Divil a bit. The old un's so fond of us, he won't let us shtir, and he always sends four dark gintlemen wid shpears if I think I'd like to go for a walk."

"Then you are all prisoners?"

"Don't I tell ye no, sor. They don't call it by that name, but we can't go away."

"Oh, but this is abominable!" cried Ned, looking in the dry, humorous face before him.

"Ye'll soon get used to it, sor. But just a frindly wurrud. I'd be civil, for they've an ugly way of handling things here, being savage-like. There isn't a wan among 'em as knows the vartue of a bit o' blackthorn, but they handle their shpears dangerously, and ivery man's got his nasty ugly skewer in his belt—you know, his kris—and it's out wid it, and ructions before ye know where ye are."

"Yes; I saw that every man had his kris," said Ned, thoughtfully. "But can you stay and look after the boat?"

"Didn't the masther say I was to. But nobody would dare to touch a thing here. Here he is."

Ned turned sharply, and saw a little party approaching, consisting of Mr Braine, the doctor, and Murray, with the Tumongong at their side.

"Tim," said the doctor, "you can superintend here. The men are to carry everything in the boat up to the house next but one to ours."

"The one close to the trees, sor?"

"Yes. You will not want any other help. But mind that the boat is properly made fast."

"Shall I stay too, uncle?" asked Ned.

"No; come with me, and let's see our new quarters."

They were in the act of starting when the Malay chief by their side held up his hand to arrest them, looking along the river with eager eyes, where a boat, similar to the one which had first come alongside their own, could be seen approaching fast, half filled with men, eight of whom were working vigorously at the oars, while half a dozen more sat beneath the awning, with the blades of their spears thrust out at the sides, and glittering in the sun.

"Have they got him, I wonder?" said the doctor half aloud.

"Got whom?" asked Murray.

"A Malay who offended the rajah by a serious breach, and broke out of his prison about five days ago." He added a few words in the Malayan tongue to the Tumongong, who responded.

"Yes, they've got the poor wretch," said the doctor. "Well, he was a bad scoundrel. Let's stop and see them land."

The second dragon boat was rowed quickly up to the jetty, the oars laid in, and the armed men landed, and stood ready while the rowers lifted out a savagely defiant-looking man, whose wrists and ankles were heavily chained. Then a couple of more showily-dressed Malays stepped out, a little procession was formed, and the prisoner was then led, with his chains clanking and dragging in the dust, away toward the rajah's residence, the Tumongong talking rapidly to the fresh comers for a few minutes, and then rejoining the Englishmen to walk with them to the neat-looking house set apart for the enforced visitors.

They went up the steps, to find the place light, cool, and rather dark, coming as they did out of the glare of the sun; but as their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, it was to see that the place was neatly covered with matting, and that there was a darker inner room with more mats, evidently intended for sleeping.

"I should hardly have expected that you had houses to let," said Murray, who, now that their position was unavoidable, seemed bent on removing any bad impression made by his rather warm display of temper.

"We have none," said the doctor. "This is the house of one of the minor chiefs, and he has been sent elsewhere."

"But really—I would rather—oh, we can make shift in a humbler place than this."

"It is the rajah's orders that you should come here, and we are all bound to obey him."

"Oh, very well. Then we will obey," said Murray. "Look, Ned, here are our traps already. But one moment, Doctor Braine, are our men to stay here too?"

The doctor turned to the chief, who said quietly: "The man who is their servant is to stay. The others will have a house to themselves."

The next hour was spent in arranging their boxes and arms, Hamet assisting and calmly taking to his new quarters, as if nothing in nature could surprise him, and when all was done, Ned looked round eagerly.

"Come, uncle," he said; "it isn't such a bad place after all."

"No; far better than I expected, but it wants one thing."

"What's that, uncle?"

"Liberty to do what we like, boy. If we had that, we could congratulate ourselves."

"Well, try and think that you really have it," said the doctor. "There now, what do you say to coming up to my place to rest till dinner-time? Braine has promised to come."

Murray hesitated, but the doctor would take no denial, and leaving Hamet in charge of the place, they descended to find that the Tumongong, who had left them for a time, was again back, in company with the other officer.

These made a communication to the doctor, who nodded, and the two officers then bowed gravely, and went away.

"Message for you," said the doctor. "You are requested—"

"Ordered," said Murray, drily.

"Well, ordered, not to leave the village without asking permission, so that you may have an escort; but you are quite at liberty to go anywhere you please about the place."

"Ah, well," said Murray, "I am not going to complain any more to-day. I have made myself a nuisance enough. Hallo, Ned, here comes your saucy young Malay friend."

Ned looked sharply round, the doctor having stepped forward hurriedly to speak to one of the Malays seated on the steps of his house, and there, sure enough, was the gaily-dressed lad they had seen that morning, followed by his companion of the boat carrying a basket and the rod the first had used.

They saw them pass on, to be hidden directly by the trees, and they were still watching the place when the doctor returned.

"Sorry to have left you," he said. "One of my patients—he was mauled badly in a tiger-hunt, but he is coming round nicely now."

Ned pricked up his ears at the words tiger-hunt, and feeling more satisfied now with his new quarters, he followed the doctor into his garden, and then up the broad steps to the shady verandah, where a pleasant evening was spent, the dinner capitally served, Tim Driscol, now very neatly attired in white, waiting at table, and giving the scene quite a flavour of home. Then there were cigars and excellent coffee for the gentlemen, and a delightful long chat with the ladies beneath the shaded lamp which hung from one of the bamboo rafters, the doctor's daughter readily answering Ned's questions about their life and the natural history of the place. Of the former, he learned that the doctor had been persuaded while at Malacca to accept the post through the Tumongong, who was there on some kind of embassy. The terms had been tempting, and it had been arranged that he was to take his wife and daughter with him, all hesitation vanishing when the Malay chief introduced him to Mr Braine, who accepted his post directly he found that he would have the society of an Englishman, and in the end he too had brought his family. Their reception had been most cordial, and they had only to ask for any addition to their comfort to have it instantly granted by the rajah. He would give them everything, in fact, but liberty.

"Then you are quite prisoners too?" said Ned, who had listened to all this with the greatest of interest.

"I suppose so. Both papa and Mr Braine were furious at first, and said that they would never forgive the Tumongong for having tricked them, but he said it was the rajah's orders, and that he dared not have come back without a doctor, and an officer who could drill the men. And really he was so kind, and has always been such a good friend when the rajah has been in one of his mad fits, that we have all ended by liking him."

"But to be prisoners like this!" said Ned.

"Oh, we seldom think about it now. Papa says we shall never be so well off again, and the rajah, who nearly kills himself with indulgence, has such bad health that he can hardly bear to see the doctor out of his sight, and consequently papa has immense influence over him."

"But I could never settle down to being a prisoner," cried Ned.

"Till you grow used to it. Oh, don't mind; it is a whim of the rajah's, and you will soon have leave to go. We never shall. There, hark! what did I say?"

She held up her hand, and Ned leaned forward, peering out into the darkness as the low distant cry of a wild beast was heard.

"Is that a tiger?"

"Yes, and it is so common that we scarcely notice it now. They never come into the village; but of course it would be terribly dangerous anywhere beyond the houses."

Ned still leaned forward listening, as the cry was repeated, and then, in a low voice, he said: "Look, just where the light of the lamp shines faintly, I thought I saw the gleam of a spear. Can you see it?"

"Oh yes! two—three," replied the girl, quickly. "There are more."

"But what are armed men doing there?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"They are your guard. But you need not take any notice of them. Of course they will follow you about, and keep watch over your house, but they will never speak to you, or seem watching, unless you are straying too far."

"This is pleasant," said Ned, wiping his forehead.

"Oh, you will not mind after a day or two, and it is best: for it really is dangerous for an Englishman to be up here unless he is under the protection of the rajah."

The pleasant evening came to a close, and after a friendly parting from their hosts, the two fresh additions to the rajah's village walked back, Ned declaring that he could easily make out their house, and they smiled, passed out of the gate, and without catching a glimpse of either of the Malays on guard, they reached their own abode, where a shaded lamp was forming an attraction to the insects of the jungle, and Hamet was patiently awaiting their return.

"What a strange experience, Ned," said Murray, as they stood at the top of their steps, watching the bright stars and the fireflies which were gliding about among the low growth at the edge of the jungle, of which they caught a glimpse hard by.

"But it is very beautiful and soft," said Ned, thoughtfully. "What a lovely night!"

"Yes; not much like being in prison, is it?"

"No," said Ned; but, as he gazed, he could see the shadowy form of one of the guards, a fact which he did not mention, though the fact of the proximity of armed men seemed strange in connection with his uncle's next words.

"We will not tug at the tether for a few days or weeks, Ned," he said. "I daresay we shall get some rare collecting, and when we are tired, we'll slip down to the boat some night and get right away. Hamet, I daresay, could manage that."

"He would do his best, sir," said the Malay, gravely.

"Then now for a good comfortable snooze on those clean mats, for I'm tired out. Come along, Ned. Good-night, Hamet. Where do you sleep?"

"Across the door, sahib," said the man, who bore the lamp into the sleeping chamber, and then stretched himself across the entrance.

"You can sleep too, Ned," said Murray, yawning as he threw himself on his simple couch.

"No, uncle," said Ned. "I am going to lie and think a bit."

"Bah! Sleep, boy. It is only a bit of an adventure after all. Heigho-ha-hum! Good-night."

"Good-night, uncle," said Ned, as he too lay down, hearing the distant cry of a tiger through the mat-screened door; and then he began thinking about the adventures of the past day, and how strange their position was.

Only began: for in spite of tigers, mosquitoes, and the fact that fierce-looking Malay spearmen were about the place, Ned's waking moments were moments indeed, and only few. Certainly not a minute had elapsed before he was fast asleep.

Chapter Seven.

A Morning Walk.

When Ned Murray opened his eyes again, it was to gaze at the faint dawn which was making its way into the larger room; and he lay puzzled and wondering for a few minutes before he could quite make out where he was. Then it all came like a flash, and he looked across the room to dimly make out the figure of his uncle fast asleep.

Ned lay thinking for a few moments and then rose softly, ready dressed as he was, and stole out, with the bamboo flooring creaking beneath his feet.

At the top of the steps he found Hamet, and after a few words spoken in a whisper, Ned said: "I don't suppose uncle will wake yet, but if he does, say I'm gone down to look at the river."

The Malay nodded, and showed his white teeth, and Ned stepped quietly down, looking sharply round to have hard work to restrain a start, as he caught sight of four swarthy sentries standing spear in hand. But he ignored their presence, and walked slowly along, but only to be aware of the fact directly, that two of them were following quietly in his steps, and looking, as he glanced back once, with his hands in his pockets and whistling softly, singularly ghostly and strange.

For there was a heavy mist floating softly in the morning air, and as the boy slowly made his way among the houses, there was a feeling of chilliness that, in combination with the novelty of his position, made him shiver.

His intention was to have a look round the place; and, after a glance at the doctor's house with its charming garden, he walked first in one direction and then in another, conscious of the fact that his two guards were always a short distance behind, but apparently bound on quite a different mission, for they never seemed to look at him once.

Suddenly he altered his mind, and turned back to have a look at the rajah's own place, and in doing this he had to pass pretty close to the swarthy-looking spearmen, who merely drew back between two houses till he had passed, and followed as before.

"Two for uncle and two for me," said Ned at last. "Well, I never knew that I had two shadows before."

The light was getting a little clearer above the mist, which did not seem to rise above the tops of the cocoa-nut trees, and he had nearly reached the clump, in the midst of which was the clearing, when he suddenly noticed a dimly-seen figure glide out from among the trees, and another, and another—three who barred his farther advance.

"He has his guards too," thought Ned, and he turned back with the intention of going as far as the jetty, and then returning to see if his uncle was awake, when there was a sharp *clank-clink* away to his left.

The sound was familiar, but he could not recall what it was, though it came nearer and nearer, apparently from down a lane of houses.

Then, all at once, he knew. For from out of the mist came the dark figures of half a dozen men bearing spears, and directly after, between two more, the prisoner he had seen brought in the previous day; and as he caught a glimpse of the dark face, he could see that the man was slowly chewing away at his betel-nut.

Six more spearmen followed, apparently led by an officer who marched erect behind the heavily-fettered prisoner, with one hand resting upon the handle of his kris.

No one heeded the boy, and the party marched on toward the river-side, when, under the impression that the man was being taken down to embark once more, and be sent up or down the river, Ned followed, and his guard came now more closely behind.

To Ned's surprise, the leaders of the party turned off a little to the right, leaving the jetty on their left, and with it the smaller boats, but they were evidently making still for the river, and halted upon its bank, just in front of where, half hidden by the mist, the large prahu swung at her anchorage.

"They are going to hail a boat from the prahu and keep him imprisoned there," thought Ned; and as he fancied this, he began to consider how safe a place it would be for a man, so heavily chained that any attempt at escape by swimming must mean being borne down by the weight of his fetters.

He walked close up, meaning to see the prisoner put on board the boat, but no one attempted to hail the prahu, and as Ned drew aside, he saw that the prisoner was led close to the edge of the swift river, which now began to look as if it were so much liquid opal, for bright hues of orange and purple began to gleam through the wreathing mist, and the plume-like dripping tops of the various kinds of palms stood out clearer in the coming light.

"They are going to take off his chains first," thought the boy, as he drew nearer still, no one paying the slightest heed to his presence; and he had a full view of the man as the spear-bearers drew up in two lines whose ends rested on the river, leaving their officers standing by the prisoner, and undoing his bonds.

Ned was not half a dozen yards away, and a feeling of satisfaction pervaded him as he saw the wrists set free, and heard the chain clank as it was thrown on the ground.

The fetters from the man's ankles followed next, and fell to the ground, while Ned could not help wondering at the stolid aspect of the prisoner, who displayed not the slightest satisfaction at being freed from so painful and degrading a load.

What followed was so quick that Ned had hardly time to realise what it meant, for the officer signed to the prisoner to kneel down, and he sullenly obeyed, while his lower jaw was working in a mechanical fashion as he kept on grinding his betel-nut. The sun was evidently now well above the horizon, for the gray mist was shot with wondrous hues, and the palm-leaves high overhead were turned to gold. There were sweet musical notes from the jungle mingled with the harsher cries and shrieks of parrots, and with a peculiar rushing noise a great hornbill flapped its heavy wings, as it flew rapidly across the river. In short, it was the beginning of a glorious tropic day for all there but one, who knelt sullen and hopeless, only a few yards from Ned, who stood spell-bound, now that he realised what was to happen, too much fascinated by the horrible scene to turn and flee.

For, as the man knelt there with the guard of spearmen on either side, one Malay, who seemed to be an officer, but whom Ned realised to be the rajah's executioner, took out a little handful of cotton wool from the folds of his sarong, tore open the loose baju or cotton jacket his victim wore, so as to lay bare the bronze skin upon his shoulder, and placed the wool over it like a loose pad just within the collar-bone.

"Is he going to set fire to it and brand him?" thought Ned; but the next moment he drew in his breath with a hiss, as if he suffered pain, for the executioner whipped out, from its wooden sheath at his waist, a short kris with a curved handle and a dull thin steel blade. This he held with his left hand perpendicularly, with the point resting in the centre of the cotton wool, and in the momentary pause which followed, Ned saw that the culprit was gazing straight at him in a dull heavy way, and that his lips were moving as he still ground the betel-nut between his teeth.

It was but a momentary pause, and then, quick as lightning, the executioner brought his right hand with a smart blow upon the curved hilt of the kris, driving it perpendicularly into the victim's chest, transfixing his heart, and as rapidly drew it forth, while the prisoner fell back, without struggle or groan, splash into the river, where Ned saw him rolled over by the rapid current dimly-seen there, for the mist was heavy on the surface; but visible till there seemed to be a rush in the water, the dead man was snatched under, and the mist slowly rolled away, to leave the surface glittering in the morning sunshine, and taking a glorious tint of blue from the clear morning sky.

Ned saw all this vividly, and then a mist gathered over everything again, as he tottered rather than walked a few yards to where he could throw one arm round a tall slim cocoa-nut tree, and hold on, for he felt sick, and he knew that the mist now was only in his eyes.

But he saw the spearmen form up with military precision before and behind the executioner, as he calmly thrust his little kris back in the waist-folds of his sarong, and then the party marched off with their spears glittering in the morning sun, and from somewhere in the jungle a wild-fowl uttered his sharp short crow.

"Am I going to faint?" thought Ned; and then he started and turned sharply round, for a voice said quickly: "Ah, my lad! You there?"

Ned saw that it was Mr Braine standing before him, looking at him frowningly, and with an air of disgust.

"Yes; I came for a walk," stammered Ned, huskily.

"And you saw that?"

"Yes," cried Ned, with a passionate cry, as his blood, which had seemed chilled and to flow sluggishly through his veins, now

throbbed in his temples. “I could not stop them. I did not know. They have just murdered a man. He fell into the river, and—and—oh, it is too horrible!”

“It was not a murder. It was an execution by the rajah’s command,” said Mr Braine, coldly. “You ought not to have come.”

“I didn’t know, sir. I could not tell. I thought—I don’t know—I never imagined—”

“I beg your pardon, my lad,” said Mr Braine, kindly. “I thought you were attracted by a morbid desire to witness the horrible.”

“Oh no!” said Ned with a shudder. “I should have been too great a coward if I had known. But has this man the right to do such things?”

“The rajah!” said Mr Braine, shrugging his shoulders; “he is king here in his own country. He has his tiny army and navy, and he has conquered the three petty chiefs nearest to his domain.”

“But the English—the Queen,” said Ned. “It seems terrible that a man like this should have such power. Will not government interfere?”

“No. How could it? But there, come with me, and try to forget what you have been seeing.”

“But one moment, sir. Couldn’t you have interfered to save the man’s life? Did you know he was to be mur—”

“Executed, my boy. Yes, and I appealed to the rajah for mercy; but he gave me so terrible an account of the man’s life that I was silenced at once. Come, you have plenty of time before breakfast. I want you to see my home.”

Ned shivered a little as he gave a glance round at the scene, which looked so beautiful, that it seemed impossible that so great a horror could have taken place there. Then he followed the Resident, and awoke to the fact that they were alone.

“Where are the men who were following me,” he said, and Mr Braine smiled.

“Gone back to their quarters, I suppose,” he said. “They consider you are in my charge now.”

Ned gave him a curious look, which his companion interpreted directly.

"Very well," he said, laughing; "think so if you like. I suppose I am your guard. Ah, here are your two friends," for the Tumongong and the other officer came up hurriedly, and made a communication to the last speaker.

"I must put you off, Murray," he said, turning quickly to the boy. "The rajah is taken ill. You can wander about the place a bit; I daresay I shall be back soon."

He went off with the two Malay officers, and Ned hesitated for a few moments as to which direction he should take, and ending by making for the river higher up the stream, so as to get right away from the spot that he could not recall without a shudder. This part, too, looked particularly attractive with its groups of palms and large forest trees, some of which overhung the stream, one being covered with white flowers to its very summit.

It was all very beautiful as he neared it, and he began thinking of how delighted his uncle would be with the orchids and other parasitical plants which cling to the boughs; but all at once, as he was looking round, he caught sight of one of his guards, and directly after of the other, for, as if by magic, they had reappeared, and the sensation of being watched again, coming upon the recollections of the morning adventure, seemed quite to rob the place of its beauty.

"I may as well go back," he thought to himself, after wandering for a short distance among the trees, and stopping at last to lay his hand upon a branch which overhung the river, so that he could lean out and gaze down into the dark clear water, with some vague idea of seeing whether there were any fish.

He could see none, but it was very attractive to gaze down into that dark clear water with its patches of floating lotus-leaves, from among which rose the bright blue waterlily-like flowers. They seemed likely places for fish, and for a few minutes the grim horrors of the morning passed away, and he began to think of what a capital place that would be for carp-fishing, if it were an English river at home, and to wonder what kind of fish there would be there. For that there were fish he felt convinced, from a slight swirling movement he had seen, and the shaking of the stems and leaves once or twice, as if something were moving somewhere below.

That smooth shadowy pool in the river was very beautiful, and the sun streamed down through the leaves like a silver shower, as Ned still thought of the fishing, and this brought up the recollection of the boy he had seen on the river and at his return at night.

"Perhaps he's the rajah's son," thought Ned. "No," he continued inconsequently, "he couldn't be, because the rajah has lots of wives, and of course he would have plenty of sons. I know," he thought, after a pause; "he must be the Tumongong's boy. He did look something like him. I shouldn't wonder if its—"

Ned's thoughts seemed at that moment to have been cut off short, or, to use a railway phrase, shunted off on to another track—that is, from fancies about the Tumongong's son to the fishy inhabitants of the river.

For once more he noticed that about twenty feet from the overhanging bank, formed of twisted roots, on which he stood, one of the largest beds of floating lotus-leaves was being agitated by what must certainly be quite a large fish forcing its way toward him, till he could see its long brown back just beneath the surface, and gliding very slowly nearer.

It was impossible to make out what it was for the leaves, two or three of which were pushed up, and sank down again while others were forced aside.

It was quite fascinating to watch it, and Ned was longing for some fine tackle, when there was a sudden rustling in the boughs overhead, and a dark animal that he could not clearly distinguish began leaping and bounding about, chattering, shrieking, and making other strange noises, as it shook the boughs and ran out on one over the water, to hang down by one hand and a foot, chattering and showing its teeth menacingly at the big fish which was still slowly gliding nearer to the bank.

There was no mistaking what the animal was now, and wondering at its comparative tameness, Ned's attention was now diverted to what was the finest and most active monkey he had ever seen.

"I didn't know monkeys liked fishing," he was saying to himself, when the movement in the water increased, the animal in the tree swung itself nearer, and there was a rush and splash just as the spectator felt a violent shock as if some one had seized him from behind, and losing his balance he fell backward, and

then in alarm rolled over twice away from the river, and struggled up to his knees, just as a figure rushed at him again and dragged him farther away.

Chapter Eight.

A Hungry Croc.

The next moment Ned stood with clenched fists, about to fly at the Tumongong's son, as he had mentally dubbed him, but his fists unclenched, and he began to comprehend that he must have been in some danger from which he had been driven and dragged by the excited lad, who now snatched off the little flat military-looking cap he wore, and showed a crop of curly dark hair—not black, coarse, and straight like a Malay's—and as he wiped his streaming forehead with the silken sleeve of his baju, he cried fiercely: "What a jolly fool you must be to go and stand there."

"Eh? I? Was I? Would the monkey have bitten me?"

"Yes, if you had pulled his tail, and he wouldn't have let you. He bitten you? No."

"Then," said Ned, flushing a little, and feeling indignant at the young semi-savage's dictatorial speech, "why was I a jolly fool to go and stand there, pray?"

"Hark at him!" said the lad, looking round as if he were addressing an audience; "he says, Why was he a jolly fool? Oh, what a green one you are!"

"Look here, sir," said Ned, shortly; "have the goodness to be a little more respectful in your speech. I am not accustomed to be addressed in that manner."

"Oh certainly, my lord," said the lad. "Salaam maharajah, salaam." And raising his hands above his head, he bowed down almost to the ground. "I didn't know you were such a grandee."

"Never mind what I am, sir, and have the goodness to keep your place."

"Yes, my lord. Salaam maha—"

"Stop!" cried Ned, angrily. "I don't want you to do that tomfoolery to me."

The lad made a grimace, and meekly crossed his hands upon his breast.

"Now, sir, have the goodness to tell me why I was a jolly fool, and so green, as you call it. Pity people can't teach you foreigners something better than slang. Now then—answer."

"Well, to go and stand under that tree with a croc stalking you."

"Croc stalking you? What do you mean?"

"Don't you know the river's full of crocodiles?"

"I know there are some there."

"Some!" cried the lad. "Why, it's as full as a pond is of sticklebacks."

Ned stared at these words, coming out of eastern lips.

"Why, when they krissed a fellow this morning, and tumbled him into the river, Dilloo Dee says one of them snatched the body under directly. He told me just now. Didn't you see that one coming at you?"

"I saw a big fish under the lotus-leaves."

"Big fisherman you mean. Poof!" cried the boy, bursting into a roar of laughter, "it was a great croc, and I was just in time to knock you out of the way. I thought he would have got you, he made such a rush."

"Did—did you see him?" said Ned, turning a little white.

"Only got a glimpse of his wet scales; but I knew he was there stalking you, by that monkey scolding him. Oh my! how the little beggars do hate a croc."

"Then—then, you saved my life, and I didn't know it," said Ned.

"Eh? Well, I s'pose I did, for if he had pulled you down, I don't suppose we should ever have seen you again."

"Ugh!" shuddered Ned. "How horrid. What a dreadful country this is."

"Get out! I like it."

"But tell me: would that thing have dragged me in?"

"To be sure he would. Why, it's only two days since he pulled a girl into the water. She'd only gone down to wash a sarong."

"Is it a big one?" asked Ned, after gazing in a horrified way at his companion.

"Oh yes! a whacker—fifty or sixty feet long."

"Nonsense!"

"Well then, fifteen or twenty. I know it's a big one. One of our men—Dilloo, I think it was—saw him one day ashore. Look here, old chap, tell you what. We'll get some of the fellows to lend us a rope with a loose end, and a hook, and we'll set a night-line for the beggar, and catch him. What do you say?"

"I should like to, if we stay here."

"Oh, you'll stay here," said the lad, laughing. "Like fishing?"

"Passionately."

"So do I. Caught two dozen yesterday after I met you. I say, you and your uncle are bird and butterfly cocks, aren't you?"

"My uncle is a naturalist, and I help him," said Ned, rather stiffly, for this easy-going address from a young Malay, who had evidently passed all his life among English people, annoyed him. "But I say, what a knowledge you have of English."

"Oh yes, I know some English," said the lad, laughing.

"And Malay?"

"Oh, pretty tidy. I don't jabber, but I can make the beggars understand me right enough. What's your name? Murray, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"But the other? Tom—Dick—Harry?"

"Edward."

"Oh, where are you going to, Edward Gray? What is it? That's wrong. What does old Tennyson say? Hullo! what's the matter?"

"I—that is—" stammered Ned—"some mistake. You speak English so well."

"Of course I do."

"But what is your name?"

"Frank Braine."

"Then you are not the Tumongong's son?"

"Tumon grandmother's—ha! ha! What a game! Oh, I see now! I forgot that I was in nigger togs. You took me for one of them."

"Of course I did."

"Well, it's a rum one. Won't father laugh! That's why you were so cocky at first?"

"Yes, I didn't know you were Mr Braine's son. You are, aren't you?"

"Course I am. Been out here two years now. I was at Marlborough—school you know—and I'd got the whiffles or something so bad, the doctor said I should die if I wasn't sent to a warm climate. They sent a letter to the dad, and it was nine months getting to him. Ma says he was in a taking till he'd got a despatch sent down to Singapore, to be dillygraphed home to England for me to come here directly. He couldn't fetch me, you know. The ould one, as Tim calls him, wouldn't let him go. You know him?"

"Yes."

"Well, they sent me out, and after they'd carried me on board, the captain of the steamer told one of the passengers that it was a shame to have sent me, for I should die before I was half-way out. It made me so wild, that I squeaked out that he didn't know what he was talking about, and he'd better mind his own business. And he didn't either, for I began to get better directly, and the old skipper shook hands with me, and was as pleased as could be, one day just before we got to Singapore; for I had climbed up into the foretop and laughed at him, I'd got so much stronger. Then I had to go up to Malacca, and there old Bang-gong met me."

"Who?"

"Tumongong, and brought me up here, and now I'm as strong as you are."

"Yes, you look wonderfully brown and well."

"And you took me for a nigger! What a game!"

"Of course it was very stupid of me."

"Oh, I don't know. But, I say, I am glad you've come. You won't be able to go away again, but that don't matter. It's a jolly place, and you and I and old Tim will go shooting and fishing, and—I say—I shall come with you and your uncle collecting specimens."

"I hope so," said Ned, who began to like his new acquaintance. "But don't you feel as if you are a prisoner here?"

"No; not a bit. I go where I like. Old Jamjah knows I shan't run away from my people."

"Jamjar?"

"That's only my fun. I call him the Rajah of Jamjah sometimes, because he's such a beggar to eat sweets. He asks me sometimes to go and see him, and then we have a jam feed. I'm pretty tidy that way, but he beats me hollow. Perhaps he'll ask you some day, and if he takes to you and likes you, he gives you all sorts of things, for he's tremendously rich, and always getting more. He wants to find gold and emeralds and rubies if he can, to make him richer, but none of his people have the gumption to look in the right place."

"That's why he wants my uncle to go on expeditions then."

"To be sure it is; and if he finds a mine or two for the old boy, he'll make Mr Murray a rich man."

Ned looked at him thoughtfully, while the boy chattered on.

"He gave me these silk things I've got on, and lots more. It pleases him to wear 'em. Make some of my old form chaps laugh if they saw me, I know; but they're very comfortable when you're used to them, and its safer to wear 'em when you go amongst strangers, too. He gave me this kris," continued the lad, uncovering the hilt, which was wrapped in the waist-folds of

his showy plaid sarong. “That’s the way to wear it. That means peace if its covered up. If you see a fellow with his kris in his waist uncovered, that means war, so cock your pistol and look out.”

As he spoke he drew out the weapon from his waistband and handed it to Ned.

“That handle’s ivory, and they do all that metal-work fine.”

“Why, all that working and ornament is gold.”

“To be sure it is. Pull it out: there’s more gold on the blade.”

Ned took hold of the handle and drew the little weapon from its light-coloured wood sheath to find that it was very broad just at the hilt, and rapidly curved down to a narrow, wavy or flame shaped blade, roughly sharp on both edges, and running down to a very fine point. It was not polished and clear like European steel, but dull, rough, and dead, full of a curious-looking grain, as if two or three different kinds of metal had been welded together, while up near the hilt there was a beautiful arabesque pattern in gold.

“Ugh!” said Ned, returning it to its sheath; “it’s a nasty-looking thing. Is it poisoned?”

“Not it. A thing like that doesn’t want any poison upon it.”

“But krises are poisoned.”

“I never saw one that was, and father says he never did. He has asked several of the big men here about them, and they always laugh and say it is nonsense; that the only poison in them is given by a good strong arm. Everybody wears a kris here,” he continued, as he returned the weapon to his waistband. “Perhaps old Jamjah will give you one.”

“I don’t want one,” said Ned. Then, suddenly, “It seems a stupid sort of handle, doesn’t it?”

“Yes; more like a pistol, but they like it, and they know how to use it too. I say, I hope the old chap will ask you too, next time he asks me. It’s capital fun, for you can hear all his wives whispering together behind the mat curtains, and they get peeping at you while you’re having all the good things, and are longing to join in, but they mustn’t be seen by a giaour, or the

son of a giaour, as they call me. I say, if you like I'll talk to the old fellow about you, and then he's sure to ask you."

"No, don't please," replied Ned. "I nearly burst out laughing when I saw him yesterday."

"I say, it's precious lucky for you that you didn't. He'd never have forgiven you. Had he got on his grand uniform? Yes, he would have, to show himself off, and he does look comic in it too. You see it was made for him at a guess in London; and, my! it is rum to see him straddling about in it sometimes. He's just like a peacock, and as proud of his feathers. But if you had laughed it would have been horrible. So mind what you are about, for he's sure to ask you some day, and he'll call you 'goo-ood boy' if you eat enough. I taught the old cock parrot to say that. But, I say, aren't you getting hungry?"

"Yes," said Ned, quickly, for that seemed to account for a faint feeling from which he suffered.

"So am I. Daresay the old croc is," said the lad, grinning.

"Oh!" cried Ned, offering his hand, "I am grateful to you for that."

"Stuff! That's all right."

"I shall never be able to repay you."

"How do you know? Some day you'll catch an elephant putting me in his trunk, or one of our prize striped torn tigers carrying me off, like a cat and a mouse. Then it will be your turn. Come on and have breakfast with us."

"No, I can't leave my uncle."

"Then I'll come and have breakfast with you. Old Jamjah will send you your rations, and they will be good till you offend him. Then you'd better look out for squalls."

"What do you mean?"

"Poison. But old Barnes will put you up to some dodges to keep that off, I daresay. Yes, I am hungry. Come on."

Chapter Nine.

Ned loses his Hat.

The two lads had grown in an hour as intimate as if they had been friends for months, and they were chatting away together as they approached Murray's house, where Hamet was standing looking out.

"Hah!" he cried; "you are here. The master has been looking for you, and is gone again."

"Here he comes!" cried Ned's new companion, taking off and waving his cap as Murray came striding up, looked strangely at the Resident's son, and then turned to his nephew.

"I was getting anxious about you," he said. "Keep by me, my boy. Come along to breakfast. We are going up the river directly after. Mr Braine has been to say we are to go on with our work at once, and land and examine some hills about ten miles up."

"I know," said Ned's companion, "Gunong Bu."

Murray turned upon him sharply, but the lad was in nowise abashed.

"I'll go with you, and show you. I know the way through the jungle. There's an old path. I've been—"

"Thank you," said Murray, coldly. "Come, my boy, the breakfast has all been sent on by the rajah."

"I knew he would send," said their visitor. "You keep friends with him, and you'll see how civil he can be."

Murray frowned a little; and, amused by his uncle being deceived as he had himself been, Ned said quietly, "he has come to breakfast with us, uncle."

"It is very kind of him," said Murray, coldly; "but he might have waited till he was asked."

"And then you wouldn't have asked me. I say, you; he thinks like you did, that I'm a nigger."

"Well," said Murray, quickly, "are you not a Malay, in spite of your perfect English?"

"Of course not, sir; I'm Frank Braine."

"My dear sir, I beg your pardon," cried Murray. "You should have told me, Ned. Come in, my lads, I'm getting sharp-set;" and directly after, they were seated, eastern fashion, cross-legged on the mat, which was spread with Malay luxuries, prominent among which was some excellent coffee, and a hearty meal was made, with the Resident's son as much at home as if he had been a very old friend; and hardly was it ended, when Mr Braine appeared.

"Ah, Frank," he said, smiling; "not long making yourself at home, I see. The boat's ready, Mr Murray," he continued, "and plenty of provisions on board. I daresay you will get some new birds and insects on your way, and the rajah hopes you will make some discovery up in the hills."

"He seems reasonable," said Murray, laughing. "What would he like first—a gold-mine?"

"Oh, you must humour him, and then you will have plenty of opportunity for your own work. Will you want an interpreter beside your own man?"

"No," said Frank, quietly. "I'm going with them, father."

"You, my boy? Oh, very well, only try not to be rash; though I don't suppose you will have any adventures. You know, I suppose, that we have tiger and elephant about here, so take a rifle in case you meet big game."

The men were waiting below, and they were soon after despatched with Hamet to carry guns, ammunition, and the other impedimenta of a naturalist who is an enthusiastic collector. The gentlemen followed soon after, Mr Braine seeing them down to the boat, which proved to be a handsome naga, fully manned. The crew were well-armed, and as Ned glanced at their faces he, little observant as he was in such matters, could note that they were a strong, fierce-looking, determined party, who would stand at nothing their leader set them to do.

There was a friendly wave of the hand, followed by that of a couple of pocket handkerchiefs, as the boat swung out into the stream and began rapidly to ascend, for the doctor and his ladies had just strolled down to the bamboo jetty, but too late to see the party off.

"I say, don't do that," cried Frank, quickly, as Ned hung one arm over the side of the boat, and let the cool water run through his fingers.

"Of course not. I forgot Hamet did tell me."

"There's a chap at the next place with only one arm. He was hanging over the side of a boat holding his line with his hand, and a croc snapped it right off."

"Is that a traveller's tale, squire?" said Murray, drily.

"No, it isn't," said the boy, frowning. "You don't believe it? Ask him there if a croc didn't nearly seize him this morning."

"What!" cried Murray.

"Yes, uncle," said Ned. "It was so, and Frank Braine snatched me away just in time."

"Oh, get out! I only pushed you out of his way. They are nasty beggars."

He turned to the Malay guard and said a few words, to which a chorus which sounded like assent came at once.

"They say you have to be very careful, for the crocs kill a good many people every year."

"Then we will be very careful," said Murray; "and I beg your pardon for doubting you."

"Oh, that don't matter."

"And let me thank you for helping Ned here this morning."

"That's nothing," cried Frank, hastily. "Hi! Abdul!" he shouted to one of the rowers; and he hurried from beneath, the mat awning overhead, amongst the crew to the man in the bows, evidently to avoid listening to further thanks, and sat down to go on talking to the Malay, whose heavy stolid face lit up as he listened.

"So you had quite an adventure?" said Murray.

"Yes, uncle," replied Ned; and he then went on to tell of the horrible scene he had witnessed.

Murray listened with his brows knit, and then after sitting thoughtful and silent for some minutes: "Mr Braine and the doctor have not exaggerated the situation, Ned," he said. "Well, my lad, we must make the best of it. I daresay we can spend a

month here advantageously, but we must be careful not to upset the rajah, for, though he can be a capital friend, and send us out collecting in this royal way, it is evident that he can prove a very dangerous enemy. You see he is a man who has the power of life and death in his hands, and does not hesitate about using it. We are beyond help from the settlement, and unmistakably his prisoners."

"Well, I don't mind being a prisoner, uncle, if he is going to treat us like this."

"Good, lad. I'll take a leaf out of your book, and make the best of things. This is quite new ground for a naturalist, so let's set aside all worry about where we are, and think only of the wonderful objects about us."

Ned was already following out that plan, and wishing his uncle would not worry about other things, for they were riding at a pretty good rate up the clear sparkling river, and passing scene after scene of tropic loveliness that excited a constant desire in the boy to go ashore and roam amongst grand trees of the loveliest tints of green, all different from anything he had seen before.

Just then Frank came back.

"Got your shooting tackle ready?" he said.

"No, but I was thinking it was time," replied Murray, "and that we might as well land directly we see a bird or two. I want to get all the specimens I can."

"Land!" said Frank, with a merry laugh; "land here?"

"Yes; not to go any distance. Just for a ramble, and then return to the boat."

"But you couldn't, nor yet for miles farther on."

"Why? The country on either bank looks lovely."

"The trees do, but that's all jungle."

"Well, I see that," said Murray, rather impatiently.

"But you don't know what our jungle is, sir. You couldn't get a dozen yards any way."

"The trees are not so thick as that."

"No, but the undergrowth is, and it's all laced together, and bound with prickly canes, so that at every step you must have men to go before you with their parangs to chop and clear the way."

"Is a parang a chopper?"

"They chop with it," replied Frank. "It's the sword thing the men carry to cut down the wild vines and canes with."

"Do you mean to say we couldn't get through there?" said Ned.

"Yes, of course I do. Like to try? I did when I first came. Why, in five minutes you'd be horribly scratched, and your clothes torn half off your back, and you so hot you couldn't bear yourself."

Cock-a-doodle-do!

It was a peculiar broken spasmodic crow from some little distance in the jungle, and Ned turned upon the Resident's son, laughingly: "Why, there must be a road there to that farm or cottage and back."

There was an answering crow from farther away.

"Is there a village close by?" asked Murray.

"If there was a village, it would be here," said Frank, showing his white teeth. "This is the high-road of the country, and the villages are all on the rivers."

"But there must be people who keep fowls in there."

"Yes," said Frank, merrily; "Mother Nature does. Those are jungle cocks crowing. I say, look out. Don't you want one of those?"

He pointed to where a lovely bluish bird, with a long tail ending in oval disks like tiny tennis racquets, was seated some distance ahead upon a bare branch; but almost as he spoke the bird took flight, and went right on, up the river like a flash of blue light.

"Never mind; you'll have plenty more chances, and you'll soon know as much about the place as I do."

The guns were brought out of their woollen bags and charged, and the boat glided on, steered closer in to one bank now, so as to give the naturalist a better chance of a shot; with the result that he brought down in the course of the next two hours, as they followed the winding course of the river, shut in on both sides by the tall flower-decked trees, two brilliant racquet-tailed kingfishers, a pink-breasted dove, and a tiny sunbird, decked in feathers that seemed to have been bronzed and burnished with metallic tints of ruby, purple, and gold.

These were carefully picked up from the water in which they fell, laid in the sun to dry their feathers, and then put aside for preparation that evening. After this specimens were seen of gorgeously painted butterflies, one being evidently seven or eight inches across, but capture was out of the question, and Ned watched them longingly as they flitted across the stream.

"I can take you where you can catch them," said Frank; "along by the edge of the jungle where the rice-fields are; only the worst of butterfly catching there is, that a tiger may fly out and butter you, as they do the men sometimes who are at work over the rice."

"Not a pleasant way of butterfly hunting, I must say," said Murray, who, gun in hand, was watching the edge of the jungle. "What's the matter?"

For the men had suddenly ceased rowing, and the naga glided slowly on, diminishing in speed till it was stationary, and then, yielding to the influence of the stream, began to glide back.

Meanwhile an excited conversation was going on between the principal boatman and Frank Braine, the former pointing up into a huge tree whose boughs overhung the river, their tips almost touching the surface, and naturally both Murray and Ned gazed up too.

"What is it—a monkey or a bird?" said Ned, eagerly.

"Yes, I see it now," said Frank. Then, telling the men in Malay to keep the boat stationary, he turned to Murray: "Here's a shot for you, sir. I couldn't see it at first. Their eyes are sharper than ours. Wait a minute till the boat's right. That's it. Stop now, both of you look right in through that opening among the leaves, and you'll see it on a branch."

"What, some handsome bird?"

"No; something that's been up there after the birds or monkeys. Do you see? Look where I'm pointing."

"I am looking there," said Ned, eagerly; "but I can only see a great creeper all curled about and twisted in knots where it looks quite dark."

"Well, that's it," said Frank, laughing; "that great creeper. See it, Mr Murray?"

"Yes, I see it now. Wait till I change the cartridge for bigger shot."

"Yes; use your biggest for him," whispered Frank; and Ned looked on wonderingly, refraining from asking questions, for he was met by an imperious "Hush!"

"I can't see what he means, I suppose," thought Ned; and he watched eagerly now as Murray suddenly took aim and fired.

Then for a few moments there was a violent rustling and breaking of twigs, and something heavy fell with a great splash beyond the screen of leaves formed by the lowermost drooping branches.

"You hit him!" cried Frank, excitedly, and he gave an order to the men, who rowed in under the drooping boughs.

"Now quick, the other barrel!" cried the lad. "See him? Too late. He's gone!"

"I couldn't get a good sight of him," said Murray.

"But what was it?"

"A great serpent. He glided out of the river in amongst those bushes."

"Could we follow if the boat were rowed right in?"

Frank shook his head.

"Impossible," he said; and the boat was pulled out and began once more to ascend the stream.

"How big was it?" said Ned, as the incident was discussed.

“Impossible to say,” replied Murray; “but I should say fifteen or sixteen feet long, and as large round as your leg.”

Another hour’s steady pulling up against the stream brought them to quite a change in the character of the river-banks. One side had the jungle as before, but on the other the forest receded more and more, till they gazed across a park-like plain dotted with clumps of huge trees, and rising more and more till a range of hills towered up looking wonderfully beautiful, wooded as they were to the summit.

This meant a tramp, and the boat was run up beneath some trees, to one of which it was moored, while two of the guard busied themselves in spreading refreshments beneath the awning in a business-like way, which suggested that they had been used to such tasks before.

“Rather hot for a long walk,” said Frank, when the meal was finished; “but I don’t mind, if you don’t.”

Murray smiled with the calm contempt for heat usually displayed by an Englishman, took his gun and stepped ashore, followed by the boys, to find that half a dozen men armed with spears followed them, one stepping forward to act as guide, but after a few words from Frank, going back to his place with the rest.

“Now then,” he said, “what’s it to be—birds or beasts?”

“Birds to-day,” replied Murray.

“There you go then—a big one,” cried the lad, as with a rushing, heavy beating sound of its wings, a great bird flow directly over their heads, uttering a hoarse cry, and with its huge curved bill bearing a curious, nearly square, excrescence on the top, plainly seen as the bird approached.

“Why didn’t you shoot?” cried Frank, as the bird went off unscathed. “Why, I believe, I could have hit that.”

“For the simple reason that I did not want to encumber myself with a bird I have had before.”

“Oh, I see. There are lots of those about here, and I’ve found their nests.”

“What sort of a nest is it?” asked Ned. “Anything like a magpie’s?”

"No!" cried Frank; "not a bit. Big as they are, they build like a tomtit does, right in a hollow tree, but the one I saw had only laid one egg, and a tomtit lays lots. It was in the trunk of a great worm-eaten tree, and the hen bird was shut in, for the cock had filled the entrance-hole with clay, all but a bit big enough for the hen to put out her beak to be fed. What's that?"

Murray had fired and brought down a gaily-feathered bird, green, scarlet, and orange, and with a sharp wedge-shaped beak fringed with sharp bristles.

"A barbet," said Murray, giving the bird to one of the men to carry; "but like your hornbill, too common to be worth preserving."

Other birds fell to Murray's gun as they went on. A trogon was the next, a thickly-feathered soft-looking bird, yoke-toed like a cuckoo, and bearing great resemblance in shape to the nightjar of the English woods, but wonderfully different in plumage; for, whereas the latter is of a soft blending of greys and browns, like the wings of some woodland moths, this trogon's back was of a cinnamon brown, and its breast of a light rosy-scarlet blending off into white crossed with fine dark-pencilled stripes.

The next was rather a common bird, though none the less beautiful in its claret-coloured plumage; but the striking part of the bird was its gaily-coloured beak of orange and vivid blue.

The tramp in the broiling sunshine was so full of interest now, that Ned forgot the labour, and eagerly kept pace with his uncle, the Malays following closely behind, and carrying the specimens willingly enough, but with their swarthy faces wearing rather a contemptuous look for the man who, in preference to a quiet siesta beneath a tree, chose to tramp on beneath the burning sun for the sake of a few uneatable birds.

"I say," cried Frank, "I'll tell you of a bird you ought to shoot. Hist—hist!"

He made energetic signs to them to lie down among the low bushes through which they were passing.

He was obeyed at once, and most quickly by the Malays, who crouched down, spear in hand, like an ambush in waiting for something far more important than the two birds of which the lad had caught sight in a narrow glade of a park-like patch of trees they were approaching, but which now remained invisible.

“Well,” said Murray, after waiting patiently for some few minutes with his gun cocked, “what did you see?”

“Two birds you ought to have shot,” the lad whispered back, “but they must have seen us. No; look. Go on first; creep to those bushes.”

He pointed to the edge of the clump, from out of which came slowly, with stately movement, a couple of long-necked birds, one of which carried behind him an enormous train of feathers which flashed in the brilliant sunshine.

Murray needed no second hint, but crept carefully forward, taking advantage of every bush and tree which afforded him shelter, while the rest remained in concealment eagerly awaiting the result; even the Malays looking excited, with their soft dark eyes glowing and their heads craned forward.

Murray soon reduced the distance between him and the birds—quite a quarter of a mile—and it seemed as if he would easily stalk them; but while he was a full hundred yards away, something seemed to have startled the game, which rose at once and made for the open, yet just in the midst of the disappointment felt at the waste of energy over the stalk, they curved round so as to make for the shelter of the trees, passing between the watchers and Murray.

“Never mind,” said Frank, “he’ll have another chance.” Bang! following upon a puff of smoke, and the bird with the long train stopped in its flight, shot up a few yards, and then fell motionless.

Ned uttered a cheer, and the whole party hurried forward, to reach the prize some time after Murray, who had reloaded and was carefully smoothing the bird’s plumage.

“A long shot, Ned,” he said. “That must have been fully eighty yards. It was the large shot did it. There, you never saw a peacock like that.”

“Yes,” cried Ned, “often.”

“No, my lad; look again.”

“Well, it is a little different. The neck’s green.”

"Yes, instead of blue. That's the Javanese peacock, and a splendid specimen. We'll hang this up till our return. Anything likely to touch it if we hang it on a branch?"

"No, I think not, sir," replied Frank; and after the bird had been carefully suspended fully six feet from the ground, the party walked on, to find that the ground was beginning to rise steadily, an indication of their nearing the hills.

"So that's the bird you wanted me to find, was it?" said Murray, after a long silent tramp, for the bush had grown rather dense.

"Oh no. The birds I mean only come out of a night. I've only seen two since I've been here, but you can hear them often in the jungle."

"Owls?"

"Oh no; pheasants, father says they are. Birds with tremendously long tails, and wings all over great spots like a peacock's, only brown."

"Argus pheasants," said Murray, quietly. "Yes, I must try and get some specimens of them."

The ground began to rise more rapidly now, till it was quite a climb through open forest, very different to the dense jungle by the river-side. The ground, too, had become stony, with great gray masses projecting here and there, and still they rose higher and higher, till, hot and breathless, they stopped in a narrow gorge to look back at the narrow plain they had crossed, just beyond which, and fringed on the far side by the dark jungle, they could see the river winding along like a ribbon of silver.

There were several umbrageous trees here, and the air was so fresh and comparatively cool that it was decided to halt now for an hour to rest. Then, after a good look round had been taken, Murray suggested that they should return by another route to where the peacock had been hung, after which they could go direct to the boat.

The Malays lay down and began preparing fresh pieces of betel-nut to chew; but Murray's rest was short, and jumping up again, he took a geological hammer from his belt, and began to crack and chip the stones and masses of rock which peered from the barren-looking ground, the two boys, one of whom carried the gun, watching him intently.

"Plenty of quartz, Ned," said Murray. "Quite possible that one might find gold here."

As he spoke, he broke a piece of gray stone which he had hooked out from among the grass, and laid in a convenient place. A quick ejaculation came from his lips, and Frank cried excitedly, "Why, you haven't found gold?"

"No, my lad, but I have found a valuable metal. Look!"

He handed the broken halves of the stone to the boys, while the Malays crouched together, chewed away at their betel, and watched them.

"Well," said Ned, "I don't see any valuable metal. Do you?"

Frank shook his head.

"That is a fairly rich piece of ore too," said Murray. "Don't you see those little black grains running through the quartz?"

"No. These are all standing still," said Frank, laughing.

"Facetious, eh?" said Murray, smiling. "Well, those black grains are tin."

"Oh, they do get tin somewhere up the river," said Frank, eagerly; "but it isn't a bit like this."

"But it is like what this would be if it were smelted, young gentleman," cried Murray; "and, judging from appearances, I should say that the rajah could get tin enough in these hills to make him as wealthy as he likes."

"He ought to be satisfied, then, with what you have done, uncle," said Ned.

"But he will not be, my boy. He will not care to set up works, and he'll want us to try again for something better. There, we'll take our specimens to show to Mr Braine, and start back now. Give me the gun, and I'll go in the centre, and you two shall walk on either side of me, say fifty yards or so distant. You may beat up some specimens, and give me a better chance. Ask the men to keep about a hundred yards behind us."

Frank went and spoke to the men, and told them what was about to be done, and they rose, took their spears and waited while the boys started off to right and left, Murray waiting till

they had guessed their distances, and then at his signal, a low whistle, the start was made for the river, down the steep slope, and bearing off so as to leave their outward track on their left.

It was a laborious descent, and Ned found the path he had to follow encumbered by loose gray stones, and full of gins and traps, in the shape of narrow cracks in the rock, and bramble-like canes ever ready to trip him up. However, fortunately, the trees and bushes were pretty open on that dry hill-side, and he could pick his way. But there was no shot, and he saw no sign of bird or reptile; only a few butterflies which started up from among the dry herbage, and went flapping away among the trees.

Once or twice he heard the crackling of twigs on his left, and once he fancied that he could hear the Malays coming on behind him; but he was not sure, and he toiled on, bathed in perspiration, thinking how wonderfully still everything was out there, and how loud the rustling noise was he made with his boots in forcing his way through the scrub.

All at once, just as he was thinking what a likely place that steep stony hill-side looked for snakes, a magnificent butterfly sprang up within a yard or two of his feet, and as he stopped short, he saw it go fluttering on in a zigzag fashion, and then pounce down all at once, only a little way on before him, and right in the direction he had to go.

"I don't see why I shouldn't have a specimen too," he said to himself, as, regardless of the heat, he took off his straw hat, and crept silently on with his eyes fixed upon the spot where the beautiful insect had disappeared. He was within a yard of it, with upraised hat ready to strike, when it darted up, and he made a bound forward, striking downward with his hat at the same time.

The result was unexpected. Ned's step was on to nothing, and, letting go of his hat, he uttered a cry of horror as he felt himself falling through bushes, and then sliding along with an avalanche of stones, apparently right away into the bowels of the earth, and vainly trying to check himself by stretching out his hands.

One moment he saw the light dimmed by the green growth over the mouth of the opening, the next he was in utter darkness, and gliding down rapidly for what seemed, in his horror and confusion, a long period. Then all at once the rattling, echoing noise of falling stones ceased, and so did his progress, as he found himself, scratched and sore, lying on his side upon a heap

of stones, some of which were right over his legs. It did not take him long to extricate himself, and stand upright with his hands resting on a cold rocky wall, and as he stood there in the darkness, he obeyed his first impulse, which was to shout for help. But at every cry he uttered there was so terrible a reverberation and echo, that he ceased, and began to try to climb back up the great crack to the light of day.

To his horror and despair he soon found that such a climb would be impossible in the darkness, and as a flood of terrible thoughts threatened to sweep away his reason, and he saw himself dying slowly there from starvation, it seemed to him that it was not quite so dark as he thought, and peering before him, he felt about with hand and foot, and changed his position slowly, finding that the stones beneath him were pretty level till he made one unlucky step on a loose flat piece, which began to glide rapidly down. Although he tried hard to save himself, he slipped and rolled again for some distance before he could check his way, when he sat up with his heart bounding with joy, for, about a hundred yards or so before him, he could see a rough opening laced over by branches, through which gleamed the sunlight.

And now, as he cautiously made his way toward the light, he began to realise that he was in a rough rift or chasm in the rock, whose floor descended at about the same rate as the hill-slope; and five minutes after, he forced his passage out through the bushes which choked the entrance, to hear, away on his left, a distant "cooey."

He answered at once, and went on descending the hill, thinking how strange his adventure had been, and that after all it was only a bit of a fright, and that he had come part of the way underground, instead of above.

And now the heat of the sun reminded him that he had lost his hat, and he stopped short with the intention of going back, but another shout on his left warned him that he must proceed or he might be lost.

"And perhaps the Malays may find it," he argued; so tying his handkerchief over his head with a great leaf inside, he trudged on, answering the "cooeys" from time to time, till he drew nearer, and at last, in obedience to a whistle, joined his uncle about the same time as Frank.

"Nothing to show," cried the former. "I say, Ned, you got too far away. I thought at one time I'd lost you. Why, where's your hat?"

"Lost it," replied the boy, looking toward Frank as he spoke.

That young gentleman was laughing at him, and this so roused Ned's ire, sore and smarting as he was, that he did not attempt to make any explanation of his mishap, feeling assured that he would only be laughed at the more, for not looking which way he went.

They were all beginning to feel the effect of their walk in the hot sun, and in consequence they trudged back rather silently to where the peacock had been hung, and this was borne in triumph back to the boat, where the rest of the men were patiently awaiting their return.

"Wonder what they've got ready for us," said Frank, rousing up a little as they came near the river.

"Got ready? What, refreshments? Will they have anything?"

"There'll be a tremendous uproar if they have not," cried Frank. "The rajah is a regular old pirate, as my father says, and he helps himself to whatever he fancies from everybody round, but there's nothing stingy about him as you'll find."

The lad was quite right in his surmises respecting refreshments, for the men had quite a pleasant little repast spread, and most welcome of all, a great piece of bamboo, about five feet long, hanging from the side of the boat in the full sunshine, with one end swaying in the river.

"Look at that!" cried Frank. "Know what that is?"

"A very thick piece of bamboo."

"Yes, but what's in it?"

"I did not know anything was in it."

"But you will know directly. That's the big decanter, with a whole lot of deliriously cool drink in it. I don't know what it is, only that it's the old chap's favourite tipple, and it's precious good."

"Is it wine?"

"Oh no; at least perhaps they call it wine. It's somehow made with the sap out of the palm-trees, with cocoa-nut milk and fruit juice. I don't know, and it doesn't matter. As soon as you get your lips to a cup of it, you don't want anybody to talk to you till it's done."

Ned soon had an opportunity of putting the contents of the bamboo to the test, and he quite agreed with Frank's description, for it was delicious after the long hot walk, and they all sat enjoying their meal as the boat glided rapidly down stream now, the men merely dipping their oars from time to time to keep her head straight. They had spent a far longer time than Ned had expected, and the sun was sinking behind the jungle as the village was reached, and they disembarked, Hamet being ready to bear the spoils of the day up to the house, where Murray intended to commence preparing the skins at once, but found that Mr Braine was in waiting to insist upon the two newcomers dining with him at his place.

"Never mind them," he cried, as Murray pointed to his specimens; "you can get hundreds more at any time, and Barnes and his people will be horribly disappointed if you do not come."

To Ned's great satisfaction his uncle gave way, for he felt no great disposition to begin an unpleasant task after so hard a day, and the result was that after a change they went up to the Resident's house, to reach there just at the same time as the doctor, his wife, and daughter.

Chapter Ten.

A Serious Complication.

In a few weeks all thought of considering themselves as prisoners was forgotten, and Murray and Ned were as busy as it was possible to be in that hot steamy climate.

There was, however, one point about which Murray made a complaint, and spoke to Mr Braine upon the subject, and that was the presence of armed men as guards; for wherever they went, even if it was from one end of the village to the other, there were these quiet dark sentinels, and so sure as either Murray or his nephew came to the conclusion that they were

alone, the next moment one of the men would be seen pretty close at hand.

"Never mind, uncle," Ned said, laughingly; "the sun always shines here, so one must expect to have shadows."

"But I don't like it, Ned; it worries me," said his uncle; and as stated he complained to Mr Braine, who promised to speak to the rajah, and two days later came to the house where its occupants were busy skinning and drying their specimens.

"The rajah has sent me to ask if he can do anything more for you, Murray," said their visitor. "He has been saying again that he is delighted with your discovery of the tin, and that he shall some day set men to work mining and smelting, but he hopes you will persevere, and discover a good vein of gold. You are to speak as soon as you are ready for a long expedition, and the elephants will be brought up."

"Let's go soon, uncle," said Ned. "I want to have an elephant ride."

"Patience, patience, boy. There, that's not such a bad imitation of life, is it?" said Murray, holding out a beautiful amethystine-looking kingfisher.

"Capital!" said Mr Braine, smiling at the enthusiasm his new friend brought to bear in his pursuit.

"Do for us?" said Murray, thoughtfully; "do for us? No, I think not. He is wonderfully civil; feeds us too well; the attention we get is excellent, and you people treat us as if we were your brothers."

"You are satisfied, then?" said Mr Braine.

"Yes, I think so; eh, Ned?"

"I am enjoying it thoroughly," replied the latter.

"Oh yes, of course. So long as you can be always off on some prank or another with Braine's unbroken colt. It suits you, you lazy young dog."

"Oh, uncle, what a shame! Frank and I have brought you in some splendid specimens."

“Well, pretty tidy; but that rare trogon’s tail feathers were wanting in the three central pens.”

“We’ll get you another, then,” cried Ned.

“You like the place, then?” said Mr Braine.

“Like it, sir! I never imagined being a prisoner was half so good.”

“Ah yes—prisoners,” said Murray, looking up from his work, which he was still pursuing in spite of the arrival of his visitor. “Here! hi! Hamet!”

“Yes, master.”

“Go and turn those skins over carefully, and put them out of the sun. They are drying too fast.”

“Yes, master.”

“Yes; prisoners,” continued Murray. “You did not take my message to the rajah about those spearmen always following us about.”

“I did, and that was my principal reason for coming and interrupting you this morning.”

“Ah!” cried Murray, looking up with an unfortunate bird turned inside out in one hand, and a brush laden with preserving paste in the other; “what did he say?”

“That he esteemed the visit and presence of so great a scientific man too highly to run any risk of his coming to harm. That many of his people were not so enlightened as those about the court, and were likely to resent the presence of an Englishman.”

“And boy,” said Ned in an undertone.

“And boy,” said Mr Braine, smiling; “and that he would die of grief if anything happened to you; whereas, if harm happened when you had your guard, he could punish them?”

“Poor wretches!” said Murray, brushing away at his bird-skin. “Soft soap. Gammon, Braine. He is afraid that we shall slip off, eh?”

“Yes; that is the plain English of the matter.”

"And the men are to follow us still."

"Yes. You must put up with it."

"Ah, well, the place is so rich that I will not grumble. I must say that the men are never too attentive, and it would be unpleasant if we were to be speared and krissed; eh, Ned?"

"And skinned and preserved as specimens of the English for his highness's museum," said Ned, quietly, as he carefully drew the skin of a lovely blue and drab thrush over its skull.

"No one to do it," said Mr Braine, laughing.

"Well, I shall not grumble again," continued Murray. "Tell him we'll go soon right up to the hills through the jungle, and that I'll try and find him a gold-mine. You were quite right, Braine; we could not have done better for natural history if we could have gone where we liked."

"I am sure you couldn't."

"Ladies quite well—Mrs Braine and the Barnes's and Greigs?"

"Yes; but complaining that you do not visit us all more often."

"Very good of them, but I must get on with my work."

"And I with mine."

"Oh, don't hurry away. Stop and smoke a cigar. How's that boy of yours?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mr Murray."

They looked up sharply, and there was Frank standing in the veranda looking in.

"Hullo! busy, Ned?"

"Yes. Two more birds to do."

"Oh, what a bother! I want you particularly. I say, Mr Murray, why don't you let Amy Barnes skin these little tiny sun-birds? It wants some one with pretty little fingers like hers."

"Because, sir, it is not fit work for a lady," replied Murray, shortly.

"Ha, ha! what a game! Why, she asked me to get her a few, and I set that one-eyed chap to knock some down with a sumpitan—you know, Ned, a blowpipe, and she has had six these last three days, and skinned them all beautifully. She gave me one to show me how well she could do it. Here, where did I stick the thing?"

He began searching his pockets, and ended by dragging out a rough tuft of glistening metallic feathers, at which he looked down with a comical expression of countenance.

"A delightful specimen," said Murray, grimly.

"Yes, now. But it was beautiful when she showed it to me. I oughtn't to have put it in my pocket, I suppose. But, I say, Mr Murray, can't you spare Ned?"

"What do you want him for, Frank?" said his father.

"To try for that big croc that hangs about the river half-way between here and the stockade. He has just taken another poor girl, father."

"What!" cried Mr Braine, with a look of horror.

"I only just heard of it. She was reaching over to pick lotus-leaves close by, where you were so nearly caught, Ned."

"Eh?" cried Murray, looking up sharply. "Oh yes, I remember, and you are thinking of trying to shoot this monster?"

"No; going to catch him," said Frank.

"You two boys?"

"They will have some of the men to help them," said Mr Braine. "The brute ought to be destroyed."

"Why don't your rajah do it?"

"Because he does nothing that does not tend toward his pleasure or prosperity," replied Mr Braine, bitterly. "Have you made any preparations, Frank?"

"Yes, father; we're all ready. Only waiting for Ned."

He gave the latter a merry look as he spoke.

"Like to go?" said Murray.

"I don't like to leave you so busy, uncle, and seem to neglect preparing the specimens."

"But that would be getting another specimen," said Frank, merrily. "Mr Murray may have it when it's caught, mayn't he, father?"

"You go along with you, sir," cried Murray, with mock sternness. "You are spoiling my boy here. Be off with you, and mind and don't get into any danger. Here, you Ned, go and wash your fingers well first. Don't neglect that after using the paste."

Five minutes after, the two lads were off toward the bank of the river near where the rajah's stockade was situated—a strongly-palisaded place commanding the river, and within which four of the light brass guns known as lelahs were mounted. Mere popguns in the eyes of a naval officer, but big enough, to awe people who traded up and down the river in boats, and whose one or two pound balls or handfuls of rough shot and rugged scraps of iron and nails were awkward enemies for the slight timbers of a good-sized prahu.

"There will not be any danger for the boys, eh?" said Murray, looking up at where Mr Braine stood thoughtfully smoking his cigar.

"Oh no; they will have quite a little party of active men with them, ready to despatch the brute with their spears if they are lucky enough to catch him; but that is very doubtful."

He relapsed into silence, and Murray went on busily with his work, for he had had a successful shooting trip on the previous afternoon, and was trying to make up for it before his specimens decayed, as they did rapidly in that hot climate. He was so intent upon his task as he sat at the rough bamboo work-table he had rigged up, that for a time he forgot the presence of his silent visitor, till, looking up suddenly he saw that Mr Braine was gazing thoughtfully before him in a rapt and dreamy way.

"Anything the matter?" he said.

Mr Braine started, looked at his cigar, which was out, and proceeded to relight it.

"No—yes," he said slowly; "I was thinking."

"What about? No, no. I beg pardon. Like my impudence to ask you."

"No. It is quite right," said Mr Braine, slowly, and with his brow knit. "You are one of us now, and in a little knot of English people situated as we are, there ought to be full confidence and good-fellowship so that we could help each other in distress."

"Yes, of course," said Murray, laying down his work. "But, my dear fellow, don't be so mysterious. You are in trouble. What is wrong?"

Mr Braine walked to the door to see that Hamet was out of hearing, and then returning, he said in a low voice: "Look here, Murray; it is of no use to mince matters; we are all prisoners here, at the mercy of as scoundrelly a tyrant as ever had power to make himself a scourge to the district round."

"Well, it is as well to call a spade a spade," said Murray.

"Both Barnes and I were doing badly, and we were tempted by the offers we received from the rajah, and certainly I must own that, from a worldly point of view, we have both prospered far better here than we could have done in an English settlement. But we are not free agents. We never know what mine may be sprung upon us, nor how the chief people among the rajah's followers may be affected toward us through petty jealousies."

"I see—I see," said Murray.

"So far we have got on well. For years and years Barnes, who is very clever in his profession, has made himself indispensable to the rajah, and has also gained some very good friends by the way in which he has treated different chiefs and their families in serious illnesses, and for accidents and wounds. While on my part, though mine is a less satisfactory position, I have by firmness and strict justice gained the respect of the rajah's fighting men, whom I have drilled to a fair state of perfection, and the friendship of the various chiefs by acting like an honourable Englishman, and regardless of my own safety, interceding for them when they have offended their master, so that now they always come to me as their counsellor and friend, and I am the only man here who dares to tell the tyrant he is unjust."

"I see your position exactly," said Murray; "but what is behind all this. What is wrong?"

“Perhaps nothing—imagination, may be, and I don’t know that I should have spoken to you yet, if it had not been for an admission—I should say a remark, made by my son just now.”

“I do not understand you. What did he say?”

“That Miss Barnes—Amy—had been devoting herself to the preparation of some of the tiny gems of our forests.”

“Yes, yes, and very strange behaviour on the part of a young lady too.”

“I do not see it,” said the Resident, gravely. “She is a very sweet, true-hearted, handsome womanly girl. Let me see: she is past one and twenty now, and has always displayed a great liking for natural history.”

“Yes, of course,” said Murray, hurriedly. “The collection of butterflies and beetles she showed me is most creditable.”

“And it is only natural that, situated as she is, a prisoner in these wilds, she should be much attracted by the companionship of a gentleman of similar tastes, and of wide experience and knowledge.”

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense!” said Murray, fidgeting. “She has been very patient and kind of an evening in listening to me, though I am afraid I have often bored her terribly with my long-winded twaddle about ornithology and botany.”

“I can vouch for it you have not, and also that you have caused great disappointment when you have not come and joined us.”

“Oh, fancy, my dear sir,” said Murray, tugging at his great brown beard, and colouring like a girl; “your imagination.”

“It is her father’s, her mother’s, the Greigs’ and my wife’s imagination too; and this experiment of hers—commenced directly after you had been telling us all how difficult you found it with your big fingers to manipulate the tiny sun-birds—confirms what we thought.”

“My dear sir, what nonsense!” cried Murray, sweeping a bird-skin off the table in his confusion, as he snatched up his pipe, lit it, and began to smoke. “I talked like that because I wanted that idle young scamp, Ned, to devote his fingers to the task. I had not the most remote idea that it would make a young lady commence such an uncongenial pursuit.”

“Straws show which way the wind blows.”

“Look here, sir,” cried Murray, jumping up, and making the bamboo floor creak as he strode up and down. “I am not such a fool or so blind as not to comprehend what you mean. Miss Amy Barnes is a very sweet, amiable young lady.”

“Far more so than you think,” said Mr Braine, warmly. “She is a good daughter—a dear girl, whom I love as well as if she were my own child. I shall never forget the way in which she devoted herself to my boy when he came out here, still weak, and a perfect skeleton, and it is my tender affection for the girl that makes me speak as I do.”

“Then, then—oh, I am very sorry—very sorry indeed,” cried Murray. “I wish to goodness I had never come. It is nonsense, madness, impossible. I am nearly forty—that is over four and thirty. I am a confirmed bachelor, and I would not be so idiotically conceited as to imagine, sir, that the young lady could have even a passing fancy for such a dry-as-dust student as myself. I tell you honestly, sir, I have never once spoken to the lady but as a gentleman, a slight friend of her father, would.”

“My dear Murray, we have only known you a few weeks, but that has been long enough to make us esteem and trust—”

“Exactly; and it is preposterous.”

“That means, you could never care for the lady well enough to ask her to be your wife?”

“Never—certainly—never—impossible—that is—at least—no, no, no, quite impossible. I am a bookworm, a naturalist, and I shall never marry.”

“I am sorry,” said Mr Braine, thoughtfully, “for, to be frank, I rather thought there was a growing liking on your part for Amy.”

“A mistake, sir—a mistake, quite,” said Murray, warmly.

“And it would have been a happy circumstance for us now, at this rather troublesome time.”

“Eh? Troublesome? What do you mean? Is anything more the matter?”

"Yes," said Mr Braine, with his brow full of lines. "I may be wrong—we may be wrong. We have dreaded something of the kind might happen, but years have gone on, and we have had no occasion to think anything serious till now."

"You startle me. What do you mean?" said Murray, excitedly.

"Well, you see the rajah is a Mussulman."

"Yes, of course. Allah, Mahomet, and so on."

"He has several wives."

"Yes, whom he keeps shut up like birds in a cage. Well, what of that?"

"Last night we were all very much disturbed. It was before you came in."

"Ah! Yes, I noticed you were all very quiet. Why was it?"

"The rajah had sent Amy a present. It was a magnificent specimen of goldsmith's work—a large bangle of great value."

"Well?"

"Gentlemen, especially eastern gentlemen, do not send such presents as that to ladies without having some ulterior object in view."

"What!" roared Murray, in so fierce a tone of voice that Hamet came running in.

"Master call?"

"No, no: go away. Nothing.—Here Braine, you horrify me. That old tyrant dare to—to think—to send her presents—to—oh, it is horrible. The old scoundrel! He to presume to—oh!"

"We may be mistaken. It may be only a compliment."

"Nothing of the sort, sir. He meant an offer of marriage, which is sure to follow, and—oh, the insolent, tyrannical, old scoundrel!"

Mr Braine looked at Murray with a grave smile.

"This indignation's all real?" he said.

"Real? I could go and horsewhip him."

"Then you do care for Amy Barnes, in spite of your short acquaintance, Murray; and I tell you frankly I am very glad, for it may put a stop to a terrible complication, which might have risked all our lives."

Murray's face was scarlet, and he stood looking at his visitor without a word, for in his heart of hearts he owned that he was right, and that out there, in those wild jungles, he, Johnstone Murray, naturalist, who had never thought of such a thing before, had found his fate.

"Yes," said Mr Braine again, thoughtfully, "a serious complication, which might have risked all our lives."

Chapter Eleven.

The White Hen.

Meanwhile Ned and Frank had gone off eagerly to the attack upon the lurking water-dragon, terrible, in its way, as that which Saint George slew, and about half-way to the stockade they caught sight of Tim Driscol, seated under a tree, puffing away at a homemade pipe, composed of a short piece of bamboo with a reed stuck in the side. He had a neatly-made little basket by his knee, and as he saw the lads coming, he tapped the ashes out of his pipe, thrust it in his pocket, and rose to pick up his basket, in which there was evidently something alive.

"Bedad and I began to think ye didn't mane to come," he said, with his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, I should have come, Tim, if he hadn't," replied Frank.

"Av coorse ye would.—No offinse, Mr Murray, but why don't ye have a dress like the young master here? Don't he look fine? I hear you took him for a young rajah."

"You come along, and don't talk stuff!" cried Frank. "Is that the chicken?" and he nodded toward the basket. "Well sor, I'd like to tell the truth when I can."

“What do you mean? Haven’t you got a chicken?” cried Frank, wrathfully. “No, sor.”

“I gave you orders to get one for a bait, and if you haven’t got one, it’s no use for us to go on.”

“I did go to get one, sor.”

“Well?”

“And the baste at the farthest off house said he’d find one for me.”

“Well? Why, you have got it,” cried Frank; “I can hear it rustling in the basket.”

“That isn’t a chicken, sor.”

“What is it, then?” cried Frank, impatiently.

“It’s what he said was a chicken, sor.”

“What is it, then?”

“I belave it’s the ouldest hin about these parts, sor. He jabbered away in his haythen dialect, and swore it was a tinder young chicken; but it’s an ould hin, that’s laid eggs till she’s tired, and won’t lay any more, and he wants to sell her.”

“But is it white?”

“Oh yes! it’s white enough, sir.”

“That will do, then. I don’t suppose the croc can tell whether a bird’s tender or tough. Come along.”

Frank led on, leaving the palm houses behind, plunging among the trees, and winding in and out, till Ned recognised the spot where he had stopped to watch the river, and there he could see, lying about in the shade, eight or nine of the Malays, most of whom had spears, which stood leaning against the trunks of the trees.

“Now then, you two must talk English. I have got to speak in Malay, for I am going to do all the ordering this time. I say, Ned, you like fishing,” he added, laughing. “You shall hold the line.”

“But what are you going to do?”

“Wait a bit and you’ll see,” cried the lad; and he began to order the Malays about, the men hurrying here and there, and, evidently at his command, keeping right away from the banks of the river.

“Don’t want to scare our fish,” he said, hurriedly, to Ned. Then, as a man came up with a coil of rope, Frank undid a part of it, and showed that some feet of the end were not twisted, but all loose.

“Want to cutoff that bad bit?” said Ned, producing his knife.

“Bad, eh? Why, that’s the beauty of it. I’m going to tie the hook on to it just there.”

“But if you fish for a crocodile like that, he’ll break away.”

“Not he. They never do. If I fished with a hard piece of rope, he’d bite right through it.”

“Then he must bite through that loose stuff. What is it—some kind of hemp?”

“No; fibre of the gamooti palm, and his teeth will only go through the loose stuff and bother him.”

He asked for something in Malay, and one of the men handed him a curiously-shaped hook, which he attached to the loose fibrous rope, and then took a piece of stout twine from his pocket.

“Now, Tim,” he cried, laughing, “give me the worm.”

Tim opened the basket a little way, thrust in his hand, drew out the unfortunate hen, which was quite white, and began shrieking and flapping wildly till her wings were held down to her sides.

“Are you going to bait with that?” said Ned.

“Yes. Can’t afford to bait with little boys and girls,” replied Frank, merrily; “they come expensive, and the mothers don’t like it.”

“But you are going to kill it first?”

"Kill it? What for? We shouldn't get a bite if we did."

"But it's so horribly cruel."

"Is it? Well, I suppose it is, but if it wasn't killed this way, it would have been killed directly to make into a curry. This is a better end for it, for we shall save people's lives."

"If ye catch him, Masther Frank," said Tim.

"Oh, we shall catch him, Tim. You'll see. There, hold still."

As he spoke, Fred was busy tying the twine round the hen with ingenious knots, till the poor bird looked as if it had been put in harness; while, firmly secured in amongst the string bandages, and hidden by one of the wings, the hook lay ready for the reptile, if it did not prove to be too cunning to touch the bait.

"There!" cried Frank, at last; and he then said something to the Malays, from whom a murmur that was a chorus of approval, arose.

"Are you going to throw it into the river close by where I saw the monster!" whispered Ned.

"Throw it in? Why, it would drown the bird."

"Of course."

"Oh, I see you don't understand croc fishing," continued Frank, securing a piece of the fibre twine to one of the legs of the hen, and another to a stout peg of wood, leaving about five feet clear for the bird to move about.

These preparations made, Frank took the bird under his arm, twisted the rope twice about the hand which held the peg, and then, sticking a short stout staff in his belt, he stooped down, and, keeping the tree in which Ned had seen the monkey, between him and the water, he crept silently forward, dragging the rope after him, till he was close up. Then, taking the peg to which the hen was tethered, he drove it quickly and firmly down into the ground, as near to the edge of the bank as he could reach.

Ned watched him excitedly, and as he recalled his own adventure, he was in dread lest the reptile should make a rush at the gaily-clad figure, so occupied in his task that he would have been quite at the monster's mercy.

Similar thoughts evidently troubled the Malays, for five of the men took their spears from where they leaned, and stood some thirty feet behind the lad, ready to rush forward to his help. But there was no need. Frank worked quickly and well, driving the peg down into the ground with the club, sufficiently tightly to keep the hen from getting free, but not hard enough to prevent its being drawn by the reptile, supposing that the twine did not break.

It was only a minute's work before the club was thrust back into his waistband, and a quantity of the rope hauled down to the bank. Then the lad trotted rapidly back, leaving the hen walking disconsolately up and down with the hook beneath its wing, and dragging the loose rope here and there; while, so little was the poor thing troubled, that it began to scratch and peck about beneath the tree by the time Frank was talking eagerly to the Malays, who now lay down again with their spears ready.

"Shall I howld the rope, sor?" said Tim.

"No. Mr Murray likes fishing," replied the lad, with a grin; "and he shall hold the line till there's a bite. Better tie that other end, though, to that little tree."

Tim obeyed, and then seated himself in the shadiest place he could find, and took out his pipe again.

"Now, Ned, lay hold; and when the fish bites, give him plenty of line. Don't strike."

Ned took the rope offered to him eagerly, and yet with a feeling of reluctance, for the game was formidable.

"Let him go back into the river, and swallow the bait; then we'll talk to him. Now all lie down and be quiet."

The Malays were already as silent and motionless as a group in bronze, and Tim and the lads followed their example, every one watching the white hen, which, in happy ignorance of its perilous position, still pecked about quite close to the edge of the bank.

"Think it will come?" said Ned, after they had crouched there in silence for quite an hour.

"Can't say," whispered back the other. "More likely perhaps to bite of a night or early in the morning. Most likely to bite if we

were not here. Fish always do if I leave my rod for a bit. Getting tired of waiting?”

“No; it’s too exciting.”

“No need to hold the rope without you like.”

“But I do like. Will he pull very hard?”

“When he’s hooked, but you must not let him pull hard when he first takes the hen. It’s just like some kinds of fishing; you don’t want to strike till the fish has swallowed the bait.”

Another hour in that hot silence, and no signs of a crocodile. The Malays were all watchful, their dark eyes fixed on the white bird, and their spears ready; but Tim Driscol had fallen asleep with his pipe in his mouth, and the sight of the Irishman with his eyes closed, and his breath coming regularly, had a drowsy effect upon Ned, who half lay there on his side watching the glaring river, with the water looking every here and there like damascened metal. Then all at once, as Tim Driscol’s breath came thickly, the hen was not there, the rope was running out fast, there was a sudden jerk, and Ned’s eyes opened with a start.

“Don’t go to sleep,” whispered Frank. “He may come at any time.”

“Don’t go to sleep!” Then he had been asleep and dreaming, for there was the hen scratching about on the bank, and the rope lying just as it was before.

“I had only just closed my eyes, had I?”

“About five minutes, and your head was wagging about like a big fruit on a stalk. You don’t want the croc to drag you into the river too.”

These last words effectually drove away the drowsy sensation brought on by the silence and heat there beneath the trees; and, after a glance round to see that the Malays were all as watchful as ever, Ned settled down again to think about the white hen; about his own narrow escape, and then about the horrible mishap that morning, and of the poor girl’s feelings as she felt herself seized by the great reptile.

“They ought to kill them all, Frank,” he whispered.

"Kill whom?"

"The crocodiles. It is horrible to let these creatures be about the place."

"Very well; let's kill 'em all, then. There'll be plenty of sport. We're beginning with this one."

"But he does not come."

"Well then, let's give it up now and go. He is too artful. I daresay he sees us, and will not come till we are gone. We'll go away and come back this evening. That's the way the Malays catch the wretches. They don't stop to watch, only let the rope be tied to a tree, and then come back, and they often find one on."

"How do they kill it, then?"

"Same as we're going to kill this one when he is hooked; but, oh murder, I'm getting so precious hungry; let's give up now. I'll tell them we're not going to stay."

He crawled to the men, whispered softly to them for a few minutes, and then came back, pausing to rouse up Tim, who looked very stupid.

"Ready?" said Ned, who was still holding the rope attached to the hen. "No. I don't think I should like to give up. He may come yet."

"I don't know," said Frank. "The brute isn't hungry perhaps. I am, and I daresay there's a white chicken waiting at home nicely curried, and with plenty of cocoa-nut cream in it, and the whitest of rice round, ready for me. I'm hungry, and can bite; so can you. Let's be off and—eh? What?"

"Hist!" whispered Ned; "the water is moving. Look! look!"

They could only see a little of the water near the bank, where the lotus-leaves were, but they were evidently being moved by something passing through them, and the pale blue blossoms were nodding.

Then almost directly there was a splash, a hideous head appeared on the bank, the wretched hen uttered a cackling shriek and leaped up to the full extent of the tether, a loud snapping noise was heard. They had just a rapid view of a huge

scaly, dripping body in the act of turning, a great undulating tail waved in the air—there was a loud splash; and, thrilling with excitement, Ned saw the slack coils of rope running out, and that the bait was gone.

"That's right," whispered Frank excitedly, as a suppressed murmur rose from the Malays; "give him plenty of line. He won't go very far. There's lots of length;" and he stood looking on as, excited as he, Ned dragged at the rope, and passed it rapidly through his hands as it kept on running toward the bank, and into the river more and more and more, till only about ten yards were left before the end was reached—the end tied to a young cocoa-nut tree.

One of the Malays sprang up, whipped out his kris, and was going to cut the rope, for a check might have made the crocodile leave the bait before he had swallowed it, and the intention was to run with the end over to the river's brim, thus giving another fifty feet of line to run; but, just as he raised his kris, the great reptile ceased drawing out the rope, and Frank gave his young companion a congratulatory slap on the shoulder.

"Hurrah!" he cried; "he will not go any farther. He has got a lurking-place down there, under those lilies, and he is busy swallowing it."

He turned and asked one of the men a question, and the answer confirmed his opinion.

"Yes; it's all right," said Frank.

"Shall I strike now?"

"Oh no; give him plenty of time to swallow his chicken curry. I say, wait a bit; won't he find it warm in a few minutes."

"But I must strike soon. Let me do it."

"Oh yes; you shall strike, and then we'll have a lot of the fellows ready to catch hold, for that fellow's seventeen or eighteen feet long. I know, and you don't know, how strong these things are."

Ned made no reply, for he was suffering from a strange feeling of emotion: his heart beat violently, there was a sensation of suffocation in his breast, and the hands which held the rope trembled and twitched.

“Feel frightened, sor?” whispered Tim, smiling in his face.

“No, I don’t think I’m frightened, because I wouldn’t let go on any account.”

“I know. I felt just like that the first time I saw one caught, and the men let me howld the line.”

“But it must be time to strike now.”

“Why, you talk as if you had a rod in your hand, and a fish had taken your bait,” cried Frank.

“Yes; it seems just the same.”

“Only it isn’t fishing: its reptiling. Give him plenty of time.”

“But why?”

“Because perhaps he hasn’t swallowed it, and is lying down there chewing it over in his jaws. If you pulled now, you might jerk it out of his mouth.”

Ned uttered a sigh, as if he were getting rid of a great amount of pent-up emotion while he stood there grasping the rough rope with both hands, waiting and feeling more impatient than he ever had before.

“You’ll see, when we pull him out, how useful the loose strands of rope are. They’ll be stuck between his ugly teeth. My word, it will make a mess all about here. It will be wet and beaten down, and made into a regular puddle.”

“Will he struggle much?”

“I should think he will. Mind his tail.”

“You mean his head.”

“No, I don’t; I mean his tail. Of course he’ll snap and bark, but he tries to sweep people over with his tail, just as if he were mowing you off the ground. Hullo! he’s moving now. Ready? Give the rope a jerk, and hold tight.”

Ned obeyed his instructions, for the rope was beginning to glide over the bank again, and, as it tightened, Ned gave it a sharp jerk, went down headlong directly, and as he still clung to the rope, began to glide rapidly toward the river.

"Oh murther!" roared Tim.

"Let go!" shouted Frank. But in his excitement Ned held on, and he was dragged within a yard of the river before there was a tremendous check put on the rope by the Malays, who stopped its progress, and enabled Ned to struggle up, Frank joining him, and the fight now began.

At first there was nothing but a steady strain on the line, as if the end were tied to a dead tree at the bottom of the river, and this kept on for some minutes, neither side stirring.

"Oh, he's a beauty!" said Tim, who was hauling hard.

"I told you he was a big one," said Frank; but Ned made no answer. The interest was too deep, and he held on to the rope with all his strength. Then, all at once, a peculiar vibration ran through it, as if the crocodile had rapidly shaken its head, and the next moment there was a tremendous jerk, and right out in the river, a violent movement in the stilly flowing water, as if the monstrous brute had suddenly wallowed and twisted itself round, the water rising in eddies and then becoming discoloured with clouds of mud which flowed slowly by them, the direction the reptile had taken being somewhat up the river.

The plunge was tremendous, and the rope was nearly jerked out of the men's hands, but they held on, threw themselves back, and once more the dull steady strain was there, the reptile lying like a log at the bottom.

"Look at that now!" cried Tim. "I belave he's tired, and gone to slape."

"He's a coward, and won't fight," cried Frank. "Let's have him out at once," he shouted in Malay to the men, but their leader gave a decided negative.

"Says he'll begin to fight directly," continued Frank; and hardly were the words out of his mouth when there was another fierce shaking of the rope, a furious plunge, and the brute began to make the line rush through the water here and there. The lotus-leaves were cut and torn off and floated down the river, till, where the beautiful bed of flowers lay, all was muddy water churned up by the savage efforts of the beast, which tugged and dragged and sometimes drew the Malays a little nearer the brim; but just as Ned was wondering whether they had not better let go, the men recovered their lost ground again, and the water eddied and bubbled as the mud rose to the surface.

“He’s trying to burrow down,” said Frank; “wait a bit, and he’ll show himself. It’s precious deep just there.”

The fight went on, and Ned was beginning to think that their captive ought now to grow tired, when the strain suddenly ceased, and the whole party went down backward with their heels in the air.

“The hook’s broken out. Oh!” cried Ned, struggling to his knees, his voice showing his disappointment. “Ah!” he yelled, “mind! run!” for he suddenly caught sight of a fearful pair of open jaws thrust out of the water not half a dozen yards away, the monster making a savage charge right up to the bank, before its head sank down.

“Look at that now!” shouted Tim.

“Gone!” cried Ned; “and a good job too.”

“Not he,” said Frank, laughing. “Look!”

For the rope was running out again, showing that the hook was fast; and, as the boys seized the line once more, the men let it go a little, and then gradually tightened it, with the result that the crocodile turned itself over and over, thrusting its loathsome head out, curving over and diving down again, its tail appearing above the surface, waving, and giving the water a tremendous slap, which sent the spray flying right out over the bank.

It charged again right to the bank, but did not attempt to throw itself out; always turning and plunging down again into deep water, the violent efforts testing the strength of the rope and the hold of the hook, but nothing gave way, for the strands were nearly new, and the toughest of the tough.

And so the fight went on, minute after minute, the men perspiring and the boys’ hands beginning to grow sore. How long the violent plunging and churning up of the water lasted they never attempted to guess, for the interest in the fight was too engrossing as the monster now made a rush to escape down the river, now up again, and at last made so desperate a rush straight out as if to go across, that the party were taken unawares, and were jerked right forward, losing their footing and falling. Ned and Frank had to let go, to save themselves from being dragged into the river, and as they lay close to the edge, the rope passed over them, and Ned shouted, “Gone!” while Tim threw himself down in despair.

And so it seemed, for half the men had also let go, and the others had so bad a hold that they followed their companions' example, so that all the labour seemed to have been thrown away.

It was all the work of a few moments, and the reptile was now well out, and apparently escaping, when there was again a tightening, and the young cocoa-nut palm shivered and bent as the knots were tested where the end was secured.

The next moment, with a low cry of excitement, the men had seized the line again, and eased the strain on the young tree; then steadily dragging the reptile's head round, and drawing it back toward the bank till half the rope was recovered.

The struggle recommenced, for the monster seemed to be as strong as ever, but it was now allowed to have no rest, and at last it was drawn to within some twenty feet of the bank, and four of the men let go and went back.

"Here, hi! don't run away!" cried Tim.

"What are they going to do?" said Ned, panting with his efforts.

"Gone to get their spears. We're going to have him out now."

"And we're nearest!" cried Ned.

"Yes. Afraid? Shall we go back?"

"Do you want to?"

"No."

"More don't I," said Ned, desperately.

"It's all right," said Frank. "We can run out of his way if he makes a jump at us. You'll easily know if he's going to. You'll see him hump up his back if he's going to rush at us. But what you've got to mind is his tail. He'll try, as I told you, to flip you into the water. He may break your legs. Now then, be ready for a good haul. Here they are with their spears."

The four men came back, two going on each side of the rope toward the bank, and standing ready with their weapons to try to plunge them into the reptile's throat. Then the principal Malay said a few words, uttered a shout, and the strain was increased a little, then a little more, as the creature began to be

drawn nearer the bank; then they moved faster and faster, Ned wondering whether the rope and hook would stand; and as he ran on with the men, he looked back and saw the reptile's head with its jaws wide appear above the muddy bank, then its fore-paws were over, and the next moment it was gliding over the grass, striking right and left with head and tail; while, as it was dragged right away from the river, and the men paused, it raised itself up high on its feet, arching up its back like an angry toad of monstrous dimensions, and snapped its jaws.

"Pretty darlin'!" cried Tim. "Oh, how proud his mother must be. Look at his smile."

Frank uttered a triumphant shout, and Ned joined in, but only feebly, for he was too much excited and on the watch for a charge from their captive.

Two or three of these were made as the men attacked it with spears; but the strain of the rope on the reptile's head prevented it from doing any mischief, and though it laid about it, thrashing furiously with its tail, no harm was done, while the men contrived to give it thrust after thrust in the soft under-parts of the neck, weakening it so, that at last they managed to turn it over on its back, and one of the Malays leaped upon it, and with a great knife ripped it up nearly from end to end.

Ned turned away sickened as the men now unfastened the rope from the tree and retied it, so as to give the reptile a very short tether.

"There's no need for that now—is there?" said Ned, as he stood wiping his brow.

"No need to what?"

"Tie it up."

"Only, that if they did not, the brute would crawl back into the river."

"What, wounded like that?"

"Oh yes. They don't seem to mind much. They'll go back into the water even after the Malays have cut them open and taken out their inside. They always do that to see whether they are man-eaters. They're doing it now. Come and look."

"No," said Ned. "I'm satisfied. We've caught him. That's all too horrible."

By this time the report was being spread that the monster had been taken, and footsteps were heard approaching, quite a little crowd hiding the reptile from the boys, and out of which crowd rose directly after a low wailing sound.

"How horrid!" whispered Frank.

"What does it mean? Are they sorry we've killed it?"

"No, they have found something inside the beast which tells them that we have caught the right croc. I daresay it's the one that took the poor girl."

Frank was right, and after a time the lads returned, the crowd—a part of which had gone back in procession toward one of the houses—making way for them.

The men standing about the horrible reptile gave them a quiet but warm greeting, and there was a look of triumph in their eyes as one of them told Frank, what he afterwards interpreted to his companion, that this was undoubtedly the monster that had taken the poor girl; and they showed him too a silver ornament, blackened and strange looking, which must have been in the creature for perhaps months.

Ned turned shuddering away from this recital to examine the hideous mud-coloured brute, Frank eagerly showing him how the loose strands had opened out as the reptile bit at them, its great teeth passing through without damaging the strength of the rope; and it was interesting to see how the hook had taken too fast a hold to be dislodged. Then he examined the great bulky body with its crooked legs and claws, and the formidable tail, everything tending to show that it was a reptile just in the full vigour of its existence.

"They never get bigger than this, do they?" said Ned, after a careful measurement had proved the crocodile to be within an inch or two of eighteen feet, and bulky in proportion.

"Bigger? Yes, half as big again. My father saw one twenty-five feet long, but he says those very large ones are so heavy that they are slow and not so dangerous. It is those fellows from fifteen feet to eighteen that the men are most afraid of. They can quite dart through the water like a fish."

"What will they do with it?"

"They are going to leave it here till our people have seen it, and then throw it in the river again. And I hope," added Ned merrily, "it will be a lesson to all the others, and that they will behave better. Here, come along, and let's get something to eat. I say, what a horrid mess!"

"It's dishgusting, sor," said Tim. "Here, I must light a pipe to take the taste out of my mouth. But it's a puzzle—a reg'lar conundhrum, that's what it is."

"What's a conundrum?"

"Why sor, whatever crocodiles could have been made for. But I say, Masther Frank, he thought it was a chicken. He nivver knew it was a tough ould hin."

Chapter Twelve.

Through the Jungle.

A few days later, in which interval several little boating journeys had been made, the results of which could be seen in Murray's house, which was rapidly beginning to show traces of its being intended for a museum, the morning broke fine and comparatively cool; and just at sunrise Mr Braine came to where Ned and his uncle was seated at their early breakfast, to announce that the preparations settled upon the previous evening had been made.

Murray had finished his meal, but Ned was still engaged in getting ready for a tolerably long fast to mid-day, when a good meal would be prepared.

He was still lingering reluctantly over his breakfast when Frank appeared, and as soon as the two boys were together, Murray drew Mr Braine out into the veranda. "Well," he said; "any fresh news?"

"No," replied Mr Braine; "and in spite of my long experience of the man, I am half-disposed to think that I may be wrong."

"Then you do not think I need stay?"

"Oh no."

"Because I should not like to be out of the way if there was any trouble."

"You need have no fear for to-day. He has been perfectly quiet and interested in some affairs connected with the rajah of the next state. This man has offended him, and I should not feel a bit surprised if war broke out between them."

"I don't care what breaks out so long as you are wrong in your ideas about that affair," said Murray, excitedly. "It worries me so that I hardly like to leave the place to go collecting."

Mr Braine smiled to himself as he saw how genuine Murray's interest was.

"You shall have the earliest information if anything is wrong," he said.

"But why wait for anything to be wrong. Would it not be much better for the ladies to leave this place at once?"

"Much better, of course."

"Then why not make a strong effort, and get them down to Malacca?"

"For the simple reason that no efforts we could make would be half strong enough. The only way would be to try to escape."

"Well, why not try that?"

"Because there is such a thing as failure, my dear fellow, and that would mean placing us all in a ten times worse position than we are in now."

Murray frowned and looked intensely miserable.

"Come," said Mr Braine; "don't let us conjure up what may be imaginary troubles. Call those boys, and be off before the sun gets more power. I tell you that you may go away perfectly contented, for this man moves very slowly, and we shall have ample warning of any danger before it comes."

Murray sighed, and it was in rather a half-hearted manner that he handed his guns and cases to Hamet, who bore them off, and directly after they heard him talking to some one, whose

voice told at once, from its peculiar, highly-pitched intonation, that it was Tim Driscol, who the next minute appeared at the door.

"Beg pardon, sor," he said, "but masther says if it's at all convaynient would you—"

"What's the matter?" cried Murray, eagerly, catching the man by the arm.

"Oh, jist nawthing as ye may say, sor. A little out of ordher for want of fresh air, and the masther says if ye wouldn't mind takking me with ye to-day, I might be a bit useful."

Murray turned away with an impatient gesture, and exchanged glances with Mr Braine.

"I'm very sorry, sor," said Tim, quite crest-fallen, for he had been longing intensely to go on the trip. "The masther thought it would do me good, or I wouldn't have asked."

"Oh yes, you can come, my man," said Murray. "Take hold of that bag of cartridges, and go on after Hamet."

"Thank ye, sor," cried the man eagerly; and taking up the bag, and giving the two boys a delighted look, he hurried off.

"Sure, if I stay near him, and he looks at me," said Tim to himself, "he may alter that bit of him that he calls his mind."

As soon as Tim was out of hearing, Murray said excitedly: "There, you will be another man short. I had better give up the expedition."

"Nonsense! go, and I would try and make a discovery of metal if I could, even if it is only tin again. If you could hit upon gold, even if it is only some poor deposit in a stream, it would be worth everything to us now, from making him more friendly to us. Spend a little time over that as well as over the birds."

"Then you would go?"

"Certainly, and at once."

"Ready, boys?" cried Murray, quickly now, for he felt that if he thought much more about the trouble at the doctor's home, he would not be able to go.

"Yes; all ready," cried Frank, presenting himself first. "Let's be off. You are not waiting for us."

"Go on, then. The elephants are standing in front of the rajah's."

The boys needed no second request, but hurried off to find three of the huge, clumsy-looking animals, with their attendants and a party of spearmen, standing bowing their heads and waving their curled-up trunks to and fro. They were fitted with strong basket-work howdahs, and the smallest one was evidently the bearer of the refreshments, its rattan-cane howdah being more roomy and of a rougher make.

The arrangements were soon finished, and Murray mounted into the howdah of the first elephant, followed by Hamet and one of the rajah's men; the second elephant was devoted to the two boys and Tim, who took his place in the most solemn manner.

"Be on your guard for the branches," said Mr Braine. "They stretch so across the way, that on a tall elephant you have to mind, or you may be swept off."

With these parting words of warning, he gave the word, the mahouts touched their mounts' heads with an iron crook, and the party moved off, passing with its rather large guard of spearmen right by the doctor's and the merchant's houses, where the ladies stood in the verandas, and waved them a farewell.

"Want the tiger's skin?" shouted Frank to Amy. "You shall have it, if we get one."

She nodded laughingly, and said something; but they were too distant to hear the words, and directly after, the long regular shuffling gait of the elephants had taken them out of sight.

"We are not going near tigers, are we?" said Ned, rather excitedly.

"Of course we are. You can't go anywhere here without going near tigers, and if you don't go near them, they come near you. Wait a few minutes till we are well out of the village, and then you'll see the sort of place our road is.—Won't he, Tim?"

"Indade he will, sor. It's a beautiful road, with a wall on each side, or a hedge, if you like to call it so, as fresh and green as a country one, only a dale more scratchy."

Their way took them past the clump of trees in which the rajah's house was hidden, and the boys looked eagerly between the trunks, but the growth was too dense for them to see anything, even from their elevated perch, as the elephants went swinging by with the spearmen, some now in front and some behind.

"Like it?" cried Frank.

"Yes, I think so," replied Ned.

"Don't feel sea-sick, do you?"

"How can one feel sea-sick, when there is no sea—no boat."

"But you do feel a little giddy with the motion; don't you?"

"I did," replied Ned; "but it is going off fast, and I am beginning to like it."

"Yes, it's all right as long as the forest isn't too dense, and the elephant holes too deep."

"What are elephant holes?"

"Oh, wait a few minutes and you'll soon see that.—Won't he, Tim?"

"That he will, sor, and here we are."

For they had left the village behind, crossed the rice and fruit grounds, and there, all at once, without any preparation in the way of bushes or outstanding trees, was the jungle, with its huge growth rising up like a green wall shutting in some strange territory. It was even more formidable looking than the walls that shut in the river, and as Ned looked to right and left in search of the entrance to the way they were to take, he quite realised how dangerous it was for the poor folk who worked in their rice-fields close up to the black jungle and its lurking creatures.

"There you are," said Frank. "Now then, you must keep your eyes open for snakes and your ears for tigers. Your uncle will shoot if he gets a chance; won't he?"

"I don't know," replied Ned. "I don't think he is well, he has been so quiet lately; but I should hardly believe he would let anything go by."

"Nor I. He's such a shot," said Frank. "My father is pretty good, but Mr Murray is twice as sure. But we shall see no tigers going through a wood like this. The worst of it is, they can see you."

For as he was speaking, the first elephant had gone, as it were, straight into the solid green wall of verdure, and disappeared.

"Now then, Trousers," cried Frank.

"What do you call the mahout Trousers for?" asked Ned.

"I didn't. I was speaking to old India-rubber here."

"Well, why do you call him Trousers?"

"Because elephants always look to me like a big body and two pairs of trousers. Now then, look out for canes and scratches."

For the elephant they were on shuffled into the narrow track, whose sides and roof brushed the great cane howdah, and in a few moments they had passed from the glaring sunshine into the hot dank gloom of the forest, where the swishing noise of the abundant growth, forced aside and trampled down by the huge animals, was for a time the only sound.

"I say, he on the look-out, or out you'll go. We're getting into the wet now."

Frank's words were uttered just in time to make Ned seize hold of the side of the howdah, for the elephant they were on began to lurch and roll, as its legs sank deep in the soft mud and water which filled a series of holes in the track, and the driver turned round to them and smiled.

"Tell him to guide the elephant better," said Ned, as this rocking motion went on. "He is letting it put its feet in all these holes."

Frank laughed.

"It's all right," he said; "they always do that. The holes are the old footprints of other elephants, or their own, when they came along here before, and they get deeper and deeper, and full of mud and water. Elephants always keep to the old footprints, because they believe they are safe."

"But he could make them go on the hard ground."

Frank said something to the driver, who smiled as he replied.

"I told him what you said, and he says nobody could make an elephant step out of them. Look back; the other one is doing just the same."

That was plain enough, and Ned now turned his eyes on Tim, who was seated cross-legged in the hind corner of the howdah, with his arms resting on the edge.

"Ye'll soon get used to it, sor," he said, smiling. "Shakes ye up wondherful though at first. They're great onaisy pigs to ride. Would either of you gentlemen object to my shmoking my pipe?"

"Oh no, smoke away, Tim, but don't make a noise with the match."

"Nivver fear," was the reply; and the man began to prepare his bamboo-pipe, while Ned gazed wonderingly at the narrow view of the dense growth on either side, and the way in which the trees were laced together over their heads by rattan-canes and other creepers, whose leafage helped the spreading boughs far overhead to shut out the faintest ray of sunshine. In front, the way was blocked by the hind-quarters of the elephant Murray was on; behind, the smaller elephant with the provisions shut in the track, so that the spearmen who followed could only at intervals be seen, and the gloom grew deeper as *suck*, *suck*, the elephants drew their great limbs from the track holes, or plunged them in, sending a gush of mud and water flying out on either side.

"Is the forest all like this?" said Ned at last.

"The jungle is."

"But are there no other paths?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then how do the animals get about?"

"Oh, some use these tracks, but the tigers and bears creep along under and through the trees and bushes. They can go anywhere. We couldn't, without the men cut a way for us."

Skrit, *skrat*, *skrat*! went Tim's match loudly, and the elephant uttered a tremendous squeal, plunged forward, and ran its head against the hind-quarters of the one in front, which trumpeted shrilly, and catching the panic rushed on; the store elephant

following, in spite of the mahouts, who strove hard to check them in their headlong course, but in vain.

“Down, down!” shouted Frank. “Hold tight.”

His advice was needed, for the plunging and rolling of the great frightened animals was terrible, and for a while they tore on along the narrow track with the mud and water flying, and the growth from the sides and roof threatening to drag the occupants of the howdahs from their seats.

At the end of about a mile, the first elephant was checked, and of necessity the second and third had to stand, which they did with their heads pressed against the other’s tail.

“Any one hurt?” cried Murray, looking back.

“No, all right—all right,” cried the boys.

“What was it scared your elephant?”

“Oh murther, don’t tell him, Masther Frank,” whispered Tim, who then desperately told the truth.

“It’s all right, sor. I sthruck a match to light me pipe. That’s all.”

“Well then, don’t do it again.”

“No, sor.”

“Go on slowly now,” cried Murray, and progress was again made.

“An’ I should think we would go slowly,” muttered Tim. “I belave I haven’t a whole bone left, and what’s more, I didn’t light me pipe.”

“And you must not now,” cried Frank, laughing. “Oh, I did get such a switch from one of those canes.—How did you get on?”

“Something nearly pulled me out of the howdah,” replied Ned, “and I’m a bit scratched.”

“Bit scratched, sor? Look at me,” cried Tim, showing his bleeding hands. “These baskets, if ye are to have a ride in ’em, ought to have a lid to shut down.”

The elephants uttered a low sigh now and then, as they shuffled and splashed along the muddy track, whose gloomy monotony was so wearisome that Ned turned at last to his companion.

"I say," he cried, "is it all going to be like this?"

Frank laughed.

"Oh no; only for a few miles. Then we shall get to some open ground."

"You've been along here before, then?"

"Oh yes, twice; but till you get through the jungle it is very dreary."

Ned sat swaying and giving with the movements of the elephant, thinking what a terrible journey it would be for any one who had to walk, and looking back from time to time at the spearmen behind, who seemed to get along lightly enough, when he caught sight of one. Several, however, had climbed on to the rear elephant, while two had hold of the ropes of the one he rode.

All at once, just as if seen through a tunnel, there was a patch of light, and soon after the party emerged into an opening of a few acres in extent, where the sun had full power, and the growth of orchid and flowering tree lit up the scene with glowing colour. Here they heard the cries of birds, and were just in time to catch sight of the metallic green, gold, and purple of half a dozen peacocks before they hurried out of sight among the trees.

Murray obtained a few specimens of parrot and sunbird here, though, in their half-hour's halt before the leading elephant was started, and once more plunged into the continuation of the green leafy tunnel, which by contrast seemed darker than the first part.

By degrees the way of progression grew so wearisome that Ned turned to his companions to find both fast asleep, and he turned again to gaze before him at the hind-quarters of his uncle's elephant, feeling sour and ill-used and heartily sick of the tedious ride.

But all his ill-humour faded away an hour later when the elephants passed out of the tunnel once more into an undulating paradise of tree and flower, rising gradually higher

and higher to hills that appeared to be of a lovely blue; and as if roused by the glow of the sun, both Frank and Tim started up.

"Oh, here we are, then, at last," cried the latter. "Then, I suppose, the first thing is something to eat."

He was quite right, for about a mile farther on toward the hills, the elephants were halted close to a stream, over whose glancing water a huge tree of the fig tribe spread its gigantic branches, and offered a most tempting refuge from the sun.

The elephants were tethered, and the rajah's men rapidly unloaded the pannier they had brought, to spread a tempting meal beneath the tree; and this being ended, the first elephant was again brought into use to bear Murray, the two boys, and Tim, on toward the hills shooting and exploring.

This part of the expedition was so beautiful, and the specimens shot so satisfactory, that the wearisome nature of the journey out was forgotten, and that back, which had hung before Ned like a cloud, was no longer thought of.

He said something in respect to it as they walked on beside the elephant, carrying a spare gun and ammunition, and Frank laughed:

"It was tiring, but we had not had any dinner then, and that makes all the difference. I say, Mr Murray, suppose a tiger came now, what should you do?"

"Fire at it, of course."

"With small shot? Oh! I say, hadn't you better load your rifle? I'll carry it."

"Yes; it would be wise," replied Murray. "You'll promise to give it me if there is a chance."

"Of course." And the rifle was handed out of the howdah by Tim, loaded, and shouldered by Frank as they once more went on, getting now on to higher ground, where the rugged incline of the gully down which the stream whose course they followed ran, induced Murray to begin examining the stones that lay loose on one side of the little river's rocky bed.

Then there was another tramp onward, and a couple more specimens fell to the naturalist's gun.

"That's as many as we shall care to skin to-night, Ned," he said. "Let's see now if we can't discover some metal."

"Whoo-hoo!" shouted Tim, from up in the howdah. "Look sor, look! shoot! There he is!"

They followed Tim's pointing hand, to see, about a couple of hundred yards away, in an open spot where a gully ran up into a patch of forest, a full-grown tiger, whose stripes showed out clearly in the sunshine, as, with head erect and tail lashing his sides, he watched the approaching party; but before Murray could seize the rifle, the lithe animal gave a couple of leaps and had disappeared.

"Gone!" ejaculated Murray. "It would be no use to try to hunt him up, without beaters."

So the search for minerals was commenced again, with no further result than the discovery of a little tin, specimens of which were thrown up to Tim, and another halt was made.

By this time the sun was beginning to descend, and after a little hesitation, for the place was full of attractions, Murray said unwillingly, "I suppose we must go back now."

"Too soon yet, uncle," said Ned. "I should like to have a shot at something."

"Another time, my lad," said Murray. "We have been longer than I thought, and we have all that dreary ride back through the jungle. It will be dark before we get back. Yes; let's turn now at once," he continued, displaying a little anxiety as he thought of his conversation with Mr Braine that morning, and wondered that he could have so forgotten himself in his favourite pursuit as to have ignored the position of those at the village.

The lads acquiesced at once, and they mounted the elephant to look wonderingly from one to the other now, as they noted how anxious Murray had become, and impatient in his orders to Hamet to tell the driver to hurry the elephant along.

"What's the matter with your uncle?" whispered Frank at last. "Does he want something to eat?"

"I don't know," replied Ned. "I can't quite make him out. He was all right coming, and thought of nothing but the shooting; now he's all in a fidget. There!"

This was in consequence of Hamet reporting that the driver said he could get the elephant along no faster, as the road was so bad and stony.

Murray threw himself back impatiently, and sat gazing straight before them, while the elephant nodded and shuffled slowly along.

"For suppose," thought Murray, "anything should happen while I am away, I should never forgive myself. I wish now I had not come."

Chapter Thirteen.

Two Hours Late.

"It is only fancy," said Murray to himself, as, after what seemed to be an interminable length of time, they came in sight of the big tree where the other two elephants stood swinging their trunks, and the rest of the party were standing about watching for their return. There was no time lost now, for the day was getting well on, and the Malays showed plenty of eagerness to be once more well on their road, so as to be through the jungle before dark.

"I'm afraid we have rather overdone it, boys," said Murray, after a long silence, during which the elephants plodded patiently on, and their guard kept up a low muttered conversation to themselves.

"It would have been better if we had started half an hour sooner," said Frank, coolly; "but it don't matter, that I see. Once we get into the jungle track the elephants will go through it back to their quarters, and we can lie down and get a nap if we like."

All this was shouted from one elephant to the other, for the same order had been maintained as in coming. "No danger, is there?" said Ned. "Danger? Well, perhaps a little. Tiger might catch one of the men, as a cat does a mouse. You see how close they'll all keep to the elephants as soon as we enter the jungle."

"Oh, nonsense! No tiger would attack a party like this."

"Wouldn't he! You'll see."

"What?"

"Well no, I don't mean that; only that if a tiger is hungry he'd attack anything."

It seemed to be a long journey to the jungle track, and evening was growing very near, as once more the elephants plunged into the narrow dark tunnel, where the mud rarely grew dry in the huge footprints worn by the heavy animals into deep pits, each of which seemed like a trap, out of which the labouring beast had to drag its leg.

The change from the golden glow of the late afternoon to the gloom of the jungle path was again sudden, and it evoked the remark from Ned: "If it is like this now, what will it be when it's dark?"

"Why dark?" cried Frank, laughing. "Oh, you needn't mind. There's no fear of the elephants taking the wrong turning, because there isn't one. If the drivers keep them going, we shall be sure to get back home."

Then the monotonous slush slush of the elephant's tread began, mingled with the squeaking of the strong basket-work howdah, and an occasional snort from one of the great animals, as it found the task of extricating its legs harder than usual. For a time the Malays had kept up their low murmuring conversation, but this soon dropped off as the darkness increased, and they crept up close, as Frank had suggested, to the heads of the elephants, contriving so that one of the animals should form the rear-guard, and thus protect them from attack.

It was not long before the conversation between those on the two leading elephants dropped off, so that by the time it was quite dark the journey was being continued in almost absolute silence, as far as talking was concerned.

And it was dark: so black that the occupants of the howdahs could not see each other when close together, and the only way to avoid the boughs which brushed against them constantly was to crouch as low down as was possible.

Ned had been sitting silently for some time thinking all kinds of horrors, and of how huge serpents might be hanging from the boughs, or tigers watching them in the darkness, ready to spring in among them, when suddenly he started, for there was a low guttural sound like a suppressed roar close at hand, and directly after, a cold chill ran through him, for as the elephant

went on with its slow swaying motion, something which seemed to be long and round glided past his face, passed over his shoulder, and then swept about his neck.

The scene up the river came back instantaneously, and in those moments Ned mentally saw a creature like that at which his uncle had shot, hanging from somewhere above, and seeking to coil round his body to crush him in its folds.

It was all momentary, but in that brief space of time Ned sat motionless, and then his breath escaped with a low hiss, as he felt that it was Frank's arm feeling for him, and directly after the boy's lips touched his ear.

"Ned," he whispered, "here's a game. Oh Tim's asleep and snoring."

"Well, I don't see any game in that. I wish I was."

"Don't be snaggy. I mean to have a bit of fun with him."

"What could you do?"

"You know how he has been fidgeting about the tigers."

"Yes."

"Look here, then: you sit fast, and I'll just feel how he lies, and then get out of this jolly old basket, hold on to the side, and then jump in on him, take him by the neck, and give a good loud snarl. I can imitate the tigers exactly."

"And suppose he hits you with all his might?"

"I shouldn't give him time. I should roll off directly. He'd declare a tiger had jumped into the howdah, and brag about how he had escaped."

Ned was silent.

"Well, wouldn't it be a game? Why don't you answer? What are you thinking about?"

"Tim scratching a match, and frightening the elephant," said Ned quietly.

"What? this morning?"

"Yes; and of how it rushed off."

"Ah! I never thought of that," said Frank. "Perhaps it would scare it, and that would be awkward in the dark."

"Let me get down and walk before you begin," continued Ned.

"Oh, bother! I shan't do it now. I say, I don't know where we should all be if he started now."

"I don't know where we are without his starting," replied Ned. "It seems to me as if the thing's going right through the blackest part of the forest as it is."

"Nonsense! And look: it isn't so dark now. We're out in that part where we rested this morning."

That was plain enough, for a load seemed to have been suddenly lifted from their spirits. The air felt warm and fresh. The peculiar dank odour of the trampled leaves and mud was wanting, and right above them were the purple heavens ablaze with glorious stars, looking brighter and larger than they had ever seemed before.

"Hah!" ejaculated Ned, taking a long breath; "that's better."

But the pleasurable feeling soon passed away, for at the end of five minutes, the jungle track was entered upon again, and plash, plash, plash, plash, on they went, with the howdah creaking to the elephant's swing, and the boughs now dripping with moisture brushing against them as the elephants plunged on.

"Why, we shall be hours yet," said Ned. "Oh, I am getting so sick of this. It was bad enough this morning when it was daylight. Hark! What's that?"

"Tiger," said Frank, in a subdued voice, "on the prowl. But I don't suppose he'll come near us."

Frank's words did not inspire confidence. On the contrary, they made Ned feel very nervous, and begin to envy Tim's ability to sleep all through the perilous jaunt. For dangerous it was, since, setting aside the risk of an attack by some hungry tiger, there was always the possibility of one of the elephants coming down when floundering through the mud.

On still, with the motion at last growing so wearisome that the dangers were forgotten, and both of the boys began to nod, but roused up again as a hail came from the foremost elephant.

"Getting tired of it?"

"Horribly!" they shouted back; "and it's a long way yet."

Then the nodding began again, their crouching attitude fostering it, and the darkness was lit up by the dreams which came with their sound sleep, out of which they both started together; the change in the elephant's movement, from a rolling, plunging progress, something akin to that of a boat at sea without its smoothness, to a regular steady walk, waking the boys at once.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank. "Out of the jungle. Not far to go now."

As he spoke, they could see lights, and the elephants stepped out freely, bringing them in a very short time to the front of the rajah's grounds, where a group of men were standing, and among them Mr Braine, Mr Greig, and the Tumongong, who all advanced.

"You are late," cried the former. "Make haste and get down here; we have been waiting these two hours."

"Sorry to have kept you," cried Murray, as the elephants went down on their knees.

"Never mind, we'll talk later on. The rajah desires that you all come and have your evening meal with him, and tell him what you have done."

"Impossible to-night. We are not fit."

"Never mind that," said Mr Braine, rather hurriedly; "he expressed a wish for you to come, and come you must. He has been waiting two hours. The ladies are all there, and the doctor too. A dinner has been prepared for us in a room to ourselves. You will have an audience with the rajah afterwards."

The mention of the ladies being there swept away all Murray's objections, and he descended, while Frank said aloud:

"Then I shall take Ned on home to have something with me."

"No, no," cried Murray, hastily; "he must see to the specimens and guns being safely housed."

"Impossible!" cried Mr Braine, "and we are wasting time. The rajah said all, and he will be impatient. Your man Hamet must see to everything. Come along."

Chapter Fourteen.

The Rajah's Ring.

Murray was anxious, unwilling, and willing altogether, as he followed the Tumongong and a guard of the rajah's men into the lantern-lit clearing before the house; and from thence they were ushered into a room hung with mats, where water was brought in brass basins for their ablutions, before they were shown into a long dimly-lit room, where a meal was spread on mats upon the floor, while upon cushions at one end the rajah himself was seated conversing with the doctor and the ladies.

He rose and received the rest of his guests with dignity, pointing out to them the places he wished them to occupy, and then, to the surprise of all, he took the head of the board himself; a compliment which the Englishmen looked upon with suspicion, as possibly meaning something, opposed as it was to his ordinary customs.

To the boys it was delightful, for everything in the dimly-lit room was attractive: the group of guards and officials who stood behind and about the rajah in their showiest silks; the chief in his native costume now, in which bright-yellow silk predominated; and as Ned gazed at him, he could not help thinking how much better he looked in a dress which became him, for he looked now like an eastern prince, and the boy whispered so to his companion.

"Yes; he don't look such an old guy now," said Frank, in the same tone. "We English people can wear our clothes without looking foolish," he said, complacently. "They can't wear English things without being scarecrows."

"But, I say, where are his wives? There are no ladies here," whispered Ned again.

"Locked up, put away in the cupboard. Heads chopped off, perhaps," whispered Frank. "You didn't suppose they would be here to sit down and eat with such infidels as we are!"

"Oh, I didn't know."

"Well, I did. It's a wonder to see the old chap here. He's got some scheme in his head, or he wouldn't be so civil. I wonder what it is. You see they're all obliged to come if he gives orders. But be quiet: don't talk and ask questions. I'm hungry, and the things he gives you to eat are precious good, though often enough you don't know what they are."

"But, I say, tell me this," whispered Ned; "and I won't ask you any more questions. There will not be anything one don't like to eat, will there? I mean anything queer."

"What, young crocodile fatted with niggers, pickled boa constrictor, or curried baby?"

"Don't chaff. Tell me."

"Look here: do you want to know what to do?"

"Of course."

"Then you eat just the same as I do, and you can't be wrong."

Ned took the advice, and, like his companion, he was very soon enjoying himself thoroughly; too busy, in fact, to take much notice of the others, till Frank began to make remarks.

"I say, how nice Amy Barnes looks, doesn't she! Got quite a colour."

Ned glanced at her, and saw that she was flushed and looked excited, but was evidently doing her best to be at ease, talking readily enough with the Resident, and letting him translate in answer to some remark made in a grave and stately way by the rajah, who scarcely ate anything, but kept on giving instructions to his attendants to take this dish or that wine to his guests.

"What's the matter with your uncle?" said Frank, suddenly; "not poorly, is he?"

"Matter?" said Ned, looking across to where Murray was seated. "Nothing; he only looks cross."

"But he is hardly eating anything. Overdid it to-day in our walk, or else riding the elephants has made him queer. It makes some people ill, like going to sea for the first time."

Just then the rajah spoke to one of the attendants, who directly after went and filled Murray's cup with some kind of palm wine, and then the Resident's, and the doctor's.

"The rajah will take wine with us, Murray, in the English fashion," said Mr Braine; and though Murray felt as if he would like to refuse, he told himself that so far he had no real cause, and that such an act on his part might mean peril to all present. So in a very distant quiet way he took wine, the rajah merely putting his cup to his lips, while as Murray drank he could not help thinking how easily such a man might get rid of any one he disliked, and how little likelihood there was of his being ever called to account for the murder.

These thoughts gave a bitter flavour to the by no means unpalatable draught.

He had no time to dwell further on the thoughts which had been troubling him ever since he had entered the place, for the rajah spoke to Mr Braine, who bowed and turned to the naturalist:

"Our host is eager to know whether you have made any fresh discoveries."

Murray replied that he had only found more tin, and this was interpreted to the rajah, who scowled a little, and then spoke rather sharply to Mr Braine, who again interpreted.

"His highness is disappointed," he said, "for he is sure that there is an abundance of gold, and that there are precious stones in the hills. He wishes you to go again."

"Orders me to go again, you mean," said Murray, warmly.

"For Heaven's sake, man, he careful," whispered Mr Braine; but with a smile upon his face the while. "You do not know. Our lives may be at stake. Help me, pray. The ladies. Have you a specimen of anything you found?"

Murray glanced at Amy, who gave him an imploring look, and, drawing a deep breath, he felt ready to diplomatise, give up self, and smother his indignation for the sake of those before him.

The rajah's eyes were fixed upon him keenly, and he met them without flinching, but he mastered the anger at his heart, and thrusting his hand into his jacket pocket, drew out a couple of fragments of quartz. These he passed over to Mr Braine.

"The best I could do," he said. "I searched well, but this is the only metal I could find."

Mr Braine took them to the rajah, whose eyes glittered with cupidity as he saw the specimens; but as soon as he took them in his hands he returned them with a gesture of impatience, saying something quickly to Mr Braine, who bowed, looked troubled, but smiled directly, and said aloud:

"The rajah bids me say that your last discovery of tin was ample, Mr Murray, and he begs that you will start again to-morrow, making arrangements to be away three or four days, so that you may have time to penetrate right into the hills."

"But hang it all!" began Murray; and then he stopped, for he saw a frightened look in the faces of the ladies, and he altered his tone.

"I'll see to-morrow morning," he said.

"That will not do," said Mr Braine, quickly; and Murray was conscious that the Tumongong's eyes were fixed upon them, and that he was evidently comprehending every word they said. "My dear fellow, I must ask you to give way, or at all events seem to give way. Pray, be careful. That chief understands what we say, and I cannot be sure whether he is an enemy or friend."

This last was in a whisper.

"But really, Mr Braine, this is getting beyond bearing."

"No. Try to bear it for all our sakes—at all events now, and we'll talk it over later on. May I answer that you will go?"

"Yes," said Murray, bowing his head, as he uttered the monosyllable unwillingly.

Mr Braine turned to the rajah and spoke to him, his words evidently calming the great man's wrath, for he nodded and turned smilingly to address a few words to Mrs Barnes, and then to Mrs Braine, to which, with a little hesitation, they replied in the Malay tongue.

After that he turned smilingly to Amy, and evidently paid her some compliment, for she started a little and coloured, her eyes being directed the next moment at Murray, as if to apologise for having listened to the prince's words, while the Englishman bit his lip till it bled.

Meanwhile the attendants glided about silently, plying each of the guests with wine, fruits, and sweets, to all of which Frank helped himself liberally; and the guards and attendants, dimly-seen in the feebly-lit place, looked like so many statues cast in bronze.

"I say," whispered Frank, as he cut open a mangosteen, "do you notice anything?"

"Yes. Uncle looks horribly cross. He can't bear to be ordered about."

"S'pose not. No man does. But I say, don't you notice anything else?"

"No."

"Well, I do. Strikes me we are going to have a storm."

"Are we? Well, I want to look at the lightning."

"Nonsense! I mean a row. My father looks as if he had been getting into trouble with the rajah, and the ladies are all on the fidget. So's the doctor. I can't make it out."

"I fancied they looked as if they were not enjoying themselves."

"So did I, but then I wasn't sure, and it was such a beautiful supper, and I did enjoy it so. You did pretty well."

"Yes," said Ned, "I liked it."

"I know," whispered Frank; "they think it's time to get up and go to the drawing-room, and leave us gentlemen to our coffee and cigars, and there is no drawing-room that they can go to, and they daren't get up for fear of offending the grand panjandrum."

Just then the rajah, clapped his hands, and coffee was brought in, another attendant bearing a tray with some clumsy-looking cigarettes, and others bringing great pipes with water receptacles, and charcoal pans to supply lights.

The men bore pipes to the doctor and Mr Braine, and then to Murray, who took one of the clumsy-looking cigarettes, formed by so much tobacco crammed into the dry sheaths of a peculiar palm. Then the attendant came on to where the two lads were seated together, and offered them pipes.

"Go on, you ugly brown-nosed animal," said Frank; "what would they say if I tried to smoke?" Then, uttering a negative in the man's tongue, he let him pass on.

"Wasn't it tempting, Ned?" whispered the boy. "Offering a pipe to us like that. I don't see why we should not have a try. Pass those sweets, and let's have some more of that lemonady stuff. I want a durian, too, and I don't see any. Wonder whether old Pan would mind if I asked for one."

Just then the Tumongong came to where they were seated, and with a grave smile said a few words to Frank, who turned to his companion.

"The rajah says you are to come and see him to-morrow. He will send for you to look at all his curiosities."

"But how can I come if I go with my uncle?" replied Ned.

"Says how can he come if he goes shooting and gold-hunting with his uncle?" said Frank, in English.

The Tumongong smiled sadly, and replied in Malay.

"Tells me you're not to go with your uncle to-morrow, but to come here," said Frank, interpreting. "Never mind; I'll go with him."

The Tumongong said a few words.

"Oh, I'm to stop too. Very well. I don't mind. I'll stay, and we'll make the old boy give us plenty of fruit and sweets. He will, I know. Go and tell him," he continued, "that we kiss his feet."

The Tumongong smiled, patted Frank on the arm, as if he were a favourite, and returned to stand behind where his master was seated, smoking, and gazing amiably from one to the other, favouring Murray several times, and each time their eyes met, the rajah raised his golden cup to his lips, and sipped a little coffee.

At last, when the patience of every one of the English party was thoroughly exhausted, the rajah rose, which was taken as a signal for their dismissal; but the potentate reversed the etiquette of an English parting by shaking hands with the gentlemen first, and smiling almost affectionately upon Murray, whose hand he grasped warmly, while the Englishman's grip was cold and limp. Then turning to the ladies, he bade Mrs Braine, Mrs Greig, and Mrs Barnes good-night, after the custom of his country, and lastly, held out his hand to Amy, who could hardly master herself sufficiently to place hers within it.

As he grasped it firmly, he bent down and said a few words in a low tone, which made the girl shrink away with a horrified look, while Murray would have started forward, but for Mr Braine's restraining hand.

But the rajah retained the hand he held, and slipping a ring from his little finger, he placed it on one of Amy's, accompanying it with a meaning look, and then drawing back to march slowly toward the hanging mats which, divided the room from the next, and passing through followed by the chiefs and attendants; while the visitors lost no time in making for the veranda, below which an armed guard bearing lanterns was waiting, ready to escort them as far as the doctor's house, and here they salaamed and retired.

"Come in, Braine—come in, Mr Murray," said the doctor, excitedly. "I should like a few words with you both. Go in, my dears. Mrs Braine, please, don't leave them yet."

The ladies went hurriedly up the steps into the open veranda, and Mr Braine turned to his son.

"Walk home with Ned," he said quickly. "You can stay with him till I come with Mr Murray."

"Yes, father," replied the boy, and the two lads went off together toward Murray's house.

"They're going to have a confab," said Frank, "that they don't want us to hear. I was right; there's going to be a storm."

"But isn't it very strange?" said Ned, eagerly. "What does it all mean?"

"I'm regularly puzzled," cried frank. "It's impossible, of course, but it looks so like it, that I can't help thinking so."

"What do you mean?"

"That I hope I'm wrong, but it looks as if the old boy has taken a fancy to Amy."

"What—an English lady! Impossible!" cried Ned, indignantly.

"'Taint impossible here; if the rajah says he will; but if it isn't so, why did he give Amy Barnes that ring?"

"I don't know. Why did he give you that kris?"

"Oh, that was for a present. I don't understand such things, but I believe when a gentleman gives a lady a ring, it's because he means to marry her."

"But he can't; he has a wife."

"A wife!" cried Frank. "Lots. But that doesn't matter out here."

Chapter Fifteen.

A Troubled Night.

As soon as Amy entered her home, she let the pent-up agony and fear which she had hidden for hours have vent in a burst of passionate weeping, and hurried away to her own room, closely followed by her mother and Mrs Braine, leaving the gentlemen standing in the half-darkened room, silent, agitated, and each waiting for the other to speak. But for some minutes no word was spoken, and the silence was only broken by the creaking sound of the bamboo flooring, as in a violent state of agitation, Murray walked the room from end to end. Just then a low cat-like cry came from the jungle, repeated and answered from different directions, and influencing Murray, so that he went and stood at the opening, gazing across the veranda at the fireflies gliding here and there like tiny wandering stars, and listening to the cries which told him that on the jungle side they were surrounded by enemies.

As he stood there motionless, strange hoarse barking sounds came from the river, with an occasional faint splash, and then a loud beating noise, as if some monster were thrashing the surface of the river with its tail. Then, again, from the forest arose other strange cries, croakings, whinings, and sounds to

which it would have been hard to give a name, but all suggestive of the black darkness around being full of danger, and after his experience that day of the forest track, he found himself thinking of how impossible it would be for any one seeking to leave the village to escape in that direction.

Then there was the river.

"Yes," he thought; "that would be easier, for it was a broad highway, swiftly flowing down toward civilisation and safety."

Murray felt a bitter twinge of annoyance at that moment, as he thought of how he had sacrificed everything to his love for science, and as soon as he had found it necessary to accept his position, hardly troubled himself to think of the whereabouts of the boat in which he had arrived, and of where the men who formed her crew had been placed.

"Hamet will know," he thought as, in a vague way, he began to make plans, when he was interrupted by Mr Braine's voice uttering the one word, "Well?"

Murray turned at once and stood close to the other occupants of the room, drawing his breath hard, and longing to plunge at once into the conversation, but shrinking from the emotion by which he was half suffocated.

A silence of some moments succeeded Mr Braine's questioning word, and the faint murmur of women's voices could be heard from the inner rooms.

"Yes; there is no doubt about it now," said the doctor. "I have always dreaded this, but lived on in hope."

"And I," said Mr Braine, sadly.

"The base, treacherous—"

"Hush!"

Mr Braine laid his hand upon his old friend's arm, and pointed downwards to the floor, beneath which lay the open space formed by the house being raised on posts, while the flooring was so slight that anything spoken in the room could easily be heard by a listener below.

"There is not likely to be any one there who could understand us," said the doctor, impatiently. "Man, man, what is to be done?"

There was a few moments' silence, and then Mr Braine said despondently:

"I am at my wits' end. I never felt our helplessness so thoroughly as at the present moment."

Murray drew a long deep breath, and the veins in his temples seemed to throb as he stood listening to his companions' words, and waiting to hear what they intended to do next.

At last he could contain himself no longer.

"We are wasting time, gentlemen," he said. "I have not heard you say a word that promises to help us out of our difficulty."

"Ah, Mr Murray!" said the doctor, "I had almost forgotten you. Yes, it is us indeed. Well, sir, you see now our position; what can we say or do?"

"Surely you are not going to stand still, and see that insolent savage force his attentions upon your daughter."

"Sir, I would sooner see her dead than hurried into such a degrading position, but you know how we are situated, and our utter helplessness."

"But you will send for help. Mr Wilson at his station—Dindong—assured me that in a case of necessity he would see that we were protected."

"How would you send the message, sir?"

"By some Malay. He must be bribed heavily. Plenty would be glad to make the venture."

"Where will you find them, sir? Do you know that you would be sending the man to certain death?"

"Surely not."

"The river is closely watched night and day. No boat could pass down unseen."

"But a man might swim say a few hundred yards," cried Murray. "I would go myself."

"And if you escaped the crocodiles, which is not likely, what would you do then?"

"Land, and follow the stream by the bank."

The doctor uttered a low laugh.

"My dear sir, you do not know what you are saying; the bank for miles inland is utterly impassable."

"Then the other way by that elephant track."

"Farther into the enemy's country. No, sir; there is only one route—the river; and so far, I can only see violence as the way, and we are too weak to attempt that—too weak, or the rajah is too strong."

"Then do I understand you to mean that you are going to remain prostrate, and bow down your necks for this man to trample upon you?"

"Mr Murray," interposed Mr Braine, "you are too hard. You are losing your temper. Recollect, sir, that we are placed in a position whose difficulties you even now hardly realise."

"Indeed you are wrong, Mr Braine!" cried Murray, hotly.

"Then remember, sir, you are speaking to a gentleman—a father, whose heart is wrung by the position in which he is placed."

"Yes, I am wrong," said Murray, warmly; "but have some pity for me too. Doctor Barnes, you cannot be blind to what I think and feel. All this is agonising to me. Look here, sir; do you think I have not brains enough to see that this man reads me and my sentiments toward your daughter. The scoundrel—the insolent barbarian! he is actually jealous, and under his smiling civility, he is trying to crush me down or to sweep me out of his path. Do you not see what this expedition to-morrow means."

"Ah, I did not think of that!" cried Greig, excitedly.

"But I did," said Murray. "I will not go so far as to say that the wretch means to have me killed, but I do say that as my presence here might interfere with his plans, I am to be either

put out of the way, or kept up the country a prisoner, doing his work until such time as he considers it safe for me to return."

"Murray is right," said Mr Braine; "too right, I fear. You must not, you shall not risk the journey to-morrow alone. I must speak plainly now. I would not answer for your life."

"I will not go," said Murray, firmly. "I am a quiet enthusiast, but there is some old Scottish blood in my veins, gentlemen, that can be roused, and I'll fight to the death before I will see this wrong done."

"As we all would," said Mr Braine, warmly. "God bless you, Murray! You will be a tower of strength to us; but this is not a time for fighting. We are weak—the rajah is strong. He is cunning, too, with all the smiling deceit of these people, who throw you off your guard so as to get a better opportunity for striking."

"But we must act and at once, Braine."

"Yes, but it must be with quiet and dissimulation; cunning for cunning. Violence is useless."

"I don't know," said Murray, fiercely. "The future of a lady whom I boldly tell her father I love and reverence so dearly that, though my suit may be hopeless, though she may never look upon me as aught but a friend, I will die in her service to save her from such a fate as threatens her. My life is, I know, menaced now. Well, I had better try to do some good before I go, if it is only to rid the world of this tyrannical scoundrel and—"

Murray stopped short, the doctor darted to a chest and snatched out a revolver, and Mr Braine seized a sword hanging upon a couple of hooks against the wall; for all at once a violent scuffling and panting arose from beneath their feet, telling that two men were contending, and all doubt as to who one of them might be, was set aside the next moment by a familiar voice.

"Ah-hah! would ye—ye thayving baste? Shure, would ye? Take that, and that, and that."

It was plain, too, what the donations were from the sounds which followed them—dull heavy thuds of blows delivered by a sturdy fist.

The struggle was continued as all hurried out into the veranda, and down the steps to plunge below the house into the intense darkness, where all was now silent.

“Who’s there?” said the doctor. “Driscol, where are you?”

There was no reply.

“Surely the poor fellow has not been stabbed!” cried the doctor excitedly. “Wait till I fetch a light.”

He hurried back, leaving Murray and Mr Braine trying in vain to penetrate the darkness, so as to make out whether any one was near. Then the doctor’s steps were heard overhead, and his voice came down so distinctly, that both felt how a listener would hear every word.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “Driscol caught some Malay scoundrel prowling about.”

“Where is my husband!” said Mrs Braine.

“Down below with Murray. How is Amy?”

“Calmer now.”

“That’s right. Back directly.”

And then the doctor’s step made the bamboo creak as he crossed the room.

“Whoever it was must have heard every word we said,” whispered Mr Braine.

Just then the lamp the doctor carried shone down through the steps, and directly after among the posts which supported the house.

“Well?” he said, holding the lamp above his head; “heard any one?”

“Yes,” said Mr Braine in a low tone. “You.”

“You heard me speaking?”

“Every word you said.”

“How unfortunate! But where is my man? There is no one here.”

"Thank goodness!" said Mr Braine. "I was afraid the poor fellow had been stabbed. But let's look round."

The lamp's light was directed in all directions, but there was no sign except in one spot where the ground had been trampled, and a climbing-plant torn down.

"We must try to follow the trail," said the doctor; but at that moment steps were heard, and the whisking noise of some body passing through the bushes and shrubs the doctor had collected about the back of his house.

"Who's that?" cried Mr Braine, sharply.

"Only me, sor. Is the master there? Oh, there you are, sor. I wint after him, sor, for he made me a bit mad shticking at me with his kris thing."

"Are you wounded?"

"Only just a bit of a prick, sor. I've put my hankychy round it. In me arm here. It's jist nawthing."

"But who was it? What does it mean?" said the doctor, hastily examining the man's arm, while Mr Braine held the light.

"Who was it, sor? Well, I hardly know. It was so dark, but if I was to guess by the face of the man, I should say it was Mr Tumongong—an' what a name for a gintleman!—and what does it mane? Well, sor, I was having just a little whiff out of me bamboo-pipe, and takking a look round, or a feel round, it was so dark, before going to bed, when I heard a bit of a rustle, and I backed under the house to get away, for I thought it was a tiger; but it was a man, and he kept on coming nearer till he was right underneath here, and close to where we stand, and hiff—!"

"Did I hurt you?" said the doctor, who was binding Tim's wound.

"Yes, sor, thank ye, sor. It did rather, but I don't mind. Well, sor, he was listening to you gintlemen up-stairs; and as I thought it moighty ondacent, I laid howld of him, and nipped him, and we scuffled a bit, and then he pricked me wid his kris, and I hit him two or three cracks wid me fist, for I had no stick. Then he went off in the dark, and I afther him; but there wasn't a chance of catching him, for he went through the trees like a sarpent, and of course, sor, the man who runs has a better chance than the man who runs afther him."

"Did you see where he made for?" said the doctor.

"And is it see on a night like this, sor?"

"No, no. Of course not. There, come into the house, it must have been some scoundrel trying what he could pick up. Come, Braine."

They went back up the stairs into the room where Mrs Barnes and Mrs Braine were anxiously awaiting their coming, and told them that it was only a scare.

"Driscol heard some one about the place, and tried to hold him," the doctor said. "Don't be alarmed."

"But I am alarmed," said Mrs Barnes, excitedly. "I am sure there is some great trouble coming upon us."

"Then act like a true Englishwoman," said the doctor; "help your husband. Don't hinder him by being weak and hysterical."

"I'll try," said Mrs Barnes, speaking firmly.

"That's right. Now Braine, what do you propose doing next?"

"Nothing. We must wait."

"But Amy—my child?"

"I am thinking of her as much as you are," said Mr Braine, "and I see no other course but to stand firm, and to give the rajah to understand that such a thing as he is bent upon is impossible. Mr Murray will stand by us."

"Yes," said Mr Braine, moodily. "But—"

"For Heaven's sake, do not raise difficulties, man," cried the doctor. "We can do nothing to-night, but rest and gain strength for any trouble which may come to-morrow.—My dear," he continued to his wife, "you will stay with Mrs Barnes to-night; she and Amy will be glad, I am sure, of your company."

"Indeed yes," cried the doctor's wife, gratefully.

"I can do no good, Barnes, so I will go on with Murray here, and bring back Frank. You will send to me if there is the slightest need. There, good-night, all. This has been a scare, but it may

have had its crisis, and a few days hence, I hope we shall all be laughing at our fright."

He shook hands, and moved towards the door.

"Now, Greig, Murray," he said.

But Murray was standing grasping Mrs Barnes's hand, "Tell her," he whispered, "that some means shall be devised to save her from such another insult as this."

Mrs Barnes pressed his hand; and then hastily shaking hands with Mrs Braine and the doctor, he hurried out into the garden and joined the others, after which the Greigs went to their own place.

"Those boys will think we are never coming," Murray said, speaking more cheerily now.

"Well, we will soon relieve their anxiety," replied Mr Braine. "Come, that's better. We must not treat this as a panic, and exaggerate the difficulty of our position."

"I do not," said Murray, quietly. "It needs no exaggeration. Look!" he whispered; "we are followed, are we not?"

"I can hardly see for the darkness. Possibly. His men are always on the watch. No European monarch was ever better served by his secret police."

"But tell me," said Murray; "are you going back quietly to your place as soon as you have fetched Frank?"

"Not directly, perhaps, but very soon. We had better separate, and seem to be treating all this calmly, for our acts are certain to be reported to the rajah."

"And what about our words at the house?"

"What? the possibility of them having been heard, and the information conveyed to the rajah?"

"Yes."

"I cannot say. Let us both sleep on it. To-morrow I may have some plan."

"And the boys. Are they to know?"

"As little as possible. Here we are. How quiet and peaceful the place seems! Asleep, I suppose. Tired of waiting."

There was a dim light in the house devoted to Murray and his nephew; and as they reached the steps, the naturalist felt a pang of annoyance at not seeing Hamet start up and challenge them, for, as a rule, he was always in the veranda on the watch.

"It has been a long and weary day," said Murray, with the depression from which he suffered affecting his voice. "Will you go on first?"

"No; you are the master; lead on."

Murray stopped short.

"Look here," he said. "Let the boys sleep. Stop here with me. I will soon make some coffee, and we will sit and smoke and talk."

"No, no," said Mr Braine, hastily.

"But it is hard indeed if we cannot hit out some plan before morning. There, go up quietly. You will stay?"

"No," said Mr Braine, firmly. "You forget what was said when we came away. I must be at my own place in case Barnes wants me."

"Yes, of course," said Murray, quickly. "Then I will come back with you. One minute. Let me see if the boys are sleeping all right, and say a few words to Hamet."

He sprang up the steps lightly, and entered the house, but no Hamet was there to challenge him, neither were the boys in the outer room stretched on the mats, as he expected to find them—asleep.

Murray looked round quickly, and at a glance saw that the guns had been brought in and hung on their slings, the two baskets containing the specimens shot, and the others were hung upon the pegs arranged for the purpose, and the lamp was burning dimly on the rough table.

He caught up the light, and shading it with his hand, stepped lightly over the mats, and looked into the inner room, drew a

long deep breath, and stepped back to stand thinking a few moments before he set down the lamp.

He stepped to the doorway.

“Come up,” he said.

Braine obeyed.

“Sleeping soundly?”

“Take the light. Look,” said Murray, in a low voice.

Mr Braine glanced at him, surprised by his strange manner, and then he caught up the light, and went and looked in the room in his turn.

“Gone!” he said, in a low excited voice. “What is the meaning of this?”

Murray shook his head.

“There was no mistake about the directions? I told Frank to go home with your boy to bear him company, and to wait until I came. Oh, I see. The foolish fellow! He must have misunderstood me, and taken Ned home with him. They are waiting for us there.”

“And Hamet? My follower?”

“Gone with them.”

“He would not have known.”

“Then the boys have been here. Frank was fagged out, and said he would not wait for me any longer, and he has gone home. Your boy and Hamet have accompanied him to see him safely there.”

“You are speaking without conviction, Braine,” said Murray, sternly. “You say this to comfort me, and you are thinking differently. What does this mean? What desperate game is this man playing? I swear that if harm has come to that poor boy, though I die for it, I’ll shoot this rajah like a dog—like the cowardly cur he is.”

“Hush! don’t be hasty. You know that your threat may have been heard, and will perhaps be reported to the rajah.”

"Let them report it."

"Be sensible, man," whispered Mr Braine. "I feel all this as keenly as you do, and I cling to the hope that we may find the boys at my place. Come with me."

Murray made no answer, but went to one of the cases he had brought up the river in the boat, and took from it his revolver and some cartridges, charged the weapon, and then thrusting it into his breast, he turned to the Resident.

"I am ready now," he said, in a low harsh voice. "Come on."

The bamboos creaked, and the house shook with the heavy steps of the two men, as they went down, and conscious all the time that they were watched, and fully expecting to have their way barred at any moment, they retraced their steps, to halt for a minute and listen, as they came opposite the entrance to the doctor's garden. But all was silent there, and the lamps were burning just inside the door.

"Come on," whispered Mr Braine, with his voice trembling with the intense strain from which he suffered.

The distance was very short, not many yards on in the direction of the rajah's place, and here they crossed a carefully-tended garden toward the veranda, about whose creepers the fireflies were gleaming.

But there a low fierce voice challenged them from the darkness, and Murray's hand flew to his breast.

"I, Yussuf," said Mr Braine, quietly; and then, in Malay, he asked if the boys had come, and received his answer.

"Not here, and they have not been," he whispered to Murray.

"No. There is some other meaning to it," said Murray, sternly. "The rajah has had them seized. To-morrow I was to have been sent out of the way, but this is a fresh plan. Is it in consequence of what was overheard at Doctor Barnes's?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Mr Braine. "I am beginning to feel bewildered. But we must be calm. No great harm can have befallen them. It is part of some plan to force Barnes to consent to this hateful marriage."

"Then we must take time by the forelock, and go."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"There is no such thing in a case like this, man," cried Murray, angrily. "Have you not thought of what I feel?"

"Sir," retorted Mr Braine, bitterly, "have you not thought of what I feel?"

"Forgive me," said Murray, humbly. "I am half mad with rage and excitement. But, for pity's sake, propose something upon which I can act. If I could be doing something, I could bear it better."

"I can propose nothing," said Mr Braine, sadly. "We are so surrounded by difficulties, so hedged in by danger, that we cannot stir. You must remember that any premature action on our part might hasten the catastrophe we want to avert."

"But he would not dare—"

"Murray!" replied Mr Braine, with energy, as they stood there in the intense darkness, the speaker conscious that several of the rajah's spearmen were close at hand, "he would dare anything in his blind belief that he is too powerful for the English government to attack him."

"Then he must be taught."

"And I," continued Mr Braine, as if not hearing the interruption, "have been for years doing what seems now to recoil on my unhappy head, strengthening his belief in himself by training his people for him, and turning savages into decent, well-drilled soldiers, who have made him the dread of the country for hundreds of miles round."

"Come on and tell Doctor Barnes," said Murray at last, and they hurried back, almost brushing against two sentries standing among the trees, men who followed them silently, and then paused as they entered the gates, where they were joined by three more, looking shadowy and strange by the fireflies' light.

As they reached the foot of the steps, the doctor stepped forward, and then said that he would descend.

"She is asleep at last," he whispered. "Thank you for coming. You need not be so anxious now. Go back, and I promise you both that I will send Driscol on if there is the slightest need of

your help. There is not likely to be anything but a quiet insistence on his part, and this must be met firmly."

"There is likely to be something more than quiet insistence, Doctor Barnes," said Murray, sternly. "We have come to bring bad news. Those two lads have been spirited away."

"What!" cried the doctor, excitedly. "No, no; surely not. They were favourites with the rajah. Some accident or some prank. They are only boys; perhaps my man Driscol has— No, no, no. He is here in the house. But think again; had they any idea of trying some kind of night fishing, or shooting? Yes, of course. I heard Frank tell my child that he was going to sit up and watch with a Malay—of course—in the jungle, to try and trap or shoot a specimen or two of the argus pheasant for you, Mr Murray.— That is it, depend upon it, Braine."

"No," said the Resident, despondently. "He would not have gone to-night after such a weary day, and he would not have gone without telling me his plans. He told me everything, even to his trifling fishing trips on the river. There is something more—an accident, or he has been carried off."

"What! by the crocodiles?" said Murray, suddenly.

"No, no; I don't fear that. Come, man, we must be up and at work now."

"What are you going to do?" asked Murray, eagerly, for he was quivering with the intense desire he felt to be in action.

"I am going to the Tumongong. He has always been my friend."

"The man who was watching and listening to-night!"

"It could not have been the chief. He is too much of a gentleman at heart. Your servant was mistaken. Come on, Murray. We will come and tell you when we have been. He must know what has been done."

"He will not betray his master's secrets," said Murray, bitterly. "It is more than his life is worth."

"I shall not ask him to do that," said Mr Braine, slowly; "but I think he will set our hearts at rest as to the safety of our boys. Will you come?"

"Yes," said Murray, thoughtfully, "I will come. No: I cannot think of anything else having happened to them. It must be the rajah's doing. Come on then, and let us know their fate."

Chapter Sixteen.

Prisoners.

Everything looked dark as the Resident and Murray reached the Tumongong's handsome residence—handsome, though merely erected of bamboo and palm—but as they approached the steps, sounds were heard within, and very shortly after being summoned, the rajah's officer appeared fully dressed.

"Can I speak to you without being overheard?" said Mr Braine in English.

The Malay replied in his own tongue that he was prepared to hear anything the Resident had to say.

"But will what I say be overheard, I asked you?" cried Mr Braine, impatiently, still speaking in English, so that Murray might hear his words, knowing as he did that the Malay perfectly understood everything.

"I am quite ready to hear you," replied the Tumongong.

"And will what I say be carried to the rajah? Look here, Tumongong. I have always been on good terms with you since I came here, though I do consider you acted unfairly by me in not warning me in Malacca as to what my position would be."

"I am the servant of his highness," replied the officer, "and I have my duty to do toward him. When I have done that, I am your friend."

"Then tell me this: those two boys, my son and his young companion—where are they?"

Dark as it was, Murray saw the Malay start, but he was perfectly calm the next moment.

"I do not know," he said.

"Is this the truth?"

“I do not know where they are,” replied the Malay.

“Have they been seized by the rajah’s orders?”

“I do not know. The rajah, our master, is king, and does what seems good to him.”

Mr Braine made an impatient gesture, but masking his anger, he said appealingly:

“Tumongong, you have always been my friend, and the friend of my boy. I am in agony about his fate. He and his young friend have disappeared since we left the rajah’s to-night. Tell me where he is.”

“I do not know.”

“Is he safe?”

“I do not know.”

“You do know, and you will not speak,” cried Mr Braine passionately. “The rajah has had them seized.”

“The rajah is my master, and does what is good in his own eyes. If he has done this thing, it is wise and good. I do not know.”

“Then I will go to the rajah himself, and he shall tell me.—Ah!”

Murray had been standing listening impatiently to this conversation, a portion of which was translated to him, but he had now suddenly grasped his companion’s arm, and drawn his attention to the open place or veranda at the top of the steps, and upon Mr Braine looking up, he dimly saw that there was a figure standing there with a group of others behind, and in spite of the gloom he had no difficulty in seeing who the foremost figure was, and comprehending why the Tumongong had been so guarded in his replies to them.

Mr Braine addressed himself to the dimly-seen figure at once, speaking now in the Malay tongue.

“Your highness has heard all I have said,” he cried. “Tell me, has some accident befallen those two boys, or have they been taken away by your orders?”

It seemed to be a different man entirely who was now speaking, and though Murray could not comprehend a word, he grasped the rajah's meaning plainly enough, as he uttered what was evidently a command, to which Mr Braine spoke again sharply now.

The rajah uttered a low guttural word, and Murray now cried: "What does he say?"

"Go!"

"But I insist," cried Murray.

The rajah spoke again, and a dozen armed men ran from behind and leaped actively to the ground.

Murray's hand darted to his breast, but Mr Braine caught his wrist.

"Madness!" he said. "Wait."

"But—"

"Do you want to throw away two lives that are valuable to our friends?" whispered the Resident. "Do as I do. It is folly to resist now."

That moment the rajah spoke again, the men formed up around Murray and Mr Braine, and their leader said something to the latter.

"Come, Murray," he said, bitterly. "I have drilled these men to some purpose. We are prisoners, I suppose."

He took his companion's arm, and they were marched off through the darkness.

"Where will they take us?" said Murray, who was raging with pain and indignation at his inability to struggle against such force.

"To a boat, I suppose, and then put us on board one of the prahus," replied Mr Braine. "I might have known what would come of all these years of service."

They marched on in silence for a minute or two, and then Mr Braine uttered an ejaculation full of surprise; for their guards faced round to the left, and marched the prisoners into the

Resident's own garden, where the leader said a few words and pointed up.

"Prisoner in my own place?" said Mr Braine to the officer.

"His highness commands that neither you nor the bird man leaves the house till he gives orders."

"It might have been worse, Murray," said Mr Braine, as they ascended the steps, and dimly made out that the leader of the little party of guards was posting his men here and there.

"Been worse!" said Murray, angrily, as he threw himself upon a divan, "impossible!"

"Possible," said Mr Braine, quietly. "We are not quite prisoners, and are at liberty to plot and plan. They are very cunning, these people; but we English have some brains. It must be getting on toward morning. Let's have some coffee, and a quiet smoke."

"Oh, how can you take things so quietly!" cried Murray.

"Because I am more at ease. Those boys are alive. He would not kill them. He felt that they were in the way of his plans. They must have done something to make him act as he has done."

"If I could only be sure of that," said Murray, "it would be one trouble the less."

Mr Braine clapped his hands. A quiet-looking Malay entered the room, trimmed the lamp, and went out again, to return with water-pipes and a pan of charcoal; after which he retired as silently as he came, and once more entered bearing a tray with coffee.

"Smoke, drink your coffee, my dear fellow," said Mr Braine, quietly.

"I cannot."

"You must, man; you want your brain clear and your body rested."

"How can you speak so coolly, with those poor people in such agony?"

"Because I am helping them—or preparing to," said Mr Braine, cheerfully. "Then the game is not lost; be guided by me, and you shall marry Amy, and some day we will talk and chat over these troubles, which time will soften, and they will not be so horrible then."

"But if it comes to the worst," cried Murray. "If this wretched despot, presuming on his power, insists upon that poor girl becoming his wife— Wife? No; it is an insult to the name."

"He will not succeed," said Mr Braine, sternly; "even monarchs are not all-powerful. The night before the marriage, if everything else has been tried, that man will die."

"What! be murdered?" cried Murray, in horrified tones.

"No; the cup of his iniquities will be full; he will be adjudged worthy of death; he will die, and a new rajah will reign."

"A new rajah! Who will it be?"

"Hush! these places are very thin; our words might be heard."

"But tell me. You can trust me."

"Hist! some one."

There was a foot upon the steps, and the Tumongong entered and saluted both gravely.

"His highness bids me tell you," said the officer, "that he does not forget the many good services you have done for him. He desires now that you content yourselves by staying here, where you will have everything you desire."

"Except liberty," said Mr Braine, bitterly.

"Except liberty," replied the Tumongong. "Good-night. Sleep. Be obedient, and your lives are safe."

He bowed and left them, and as soon as he was out of hearing, Mr Braine told Murray what had passed.

"Then our lives are safe?"

"If we are obedient."

"I shall be obedient till I see an opportunity to strike, sir. But go on; tell me who will reign in his stead."

"That man," said Mr Braine, quietly puffing at his pipe.

"The Tumongong?"

"Yes. Still waters run deep."

"But—"

"Hush, man! Keep that in your breast. I know, and I am certain. He is our friend, but is compelled to act as he does. You saw just now—you heard his words—so did the Malays by the door, and every sentence will be reported to the rajah," said Mr Braine.

"Yes."

"If the tyrant dreamed that his officer was friendly toward us to the extent of trying to give us help, he would be marched to the river-bank at sunrise; there would be another execution, and the world would hold one honest man the less. Now, drink your coffee, and lie back and sleep."

"I cannot."

"You must. We can do nothing but wait the turn of affairs, and the more coolly we take these matters, the better able we shall be to act. Now try and rest."

Murray shook his head, and sat wondering how a man whose son had been suddenly snatched from him could drop into a calm and restful sleep. Then he wondered how Amy and the ladies were, and then he ceased wondering, for when the sun rose above the river mist and the tops of the jungle trees, it shone in between the mats hanging over the doorway, lighting up the Resident's room, and the divan where Murray lay back utterly exhausted, and now fast asleep.

Chapter Seventeen.

Where the Boys were.

"Doesn't matter out here, doesn't it?" said Ned. "Well, I tell you what it is. I shall talk to uncle about it, and he'll speak to the doctor, and tell him it would be disgraceful."

"Don't talk so loudly; those fellows are close behind."

"But they can't talk English."

"No; but some of them have heard so much that I often think they understand a little of what is said."

"I don't see any one about."

"Perhaps not, but they're following us all the same, and if you were to make a rush off now, very likely you'd run up against one of them, ready to stop you. But I don't know," continued Frank, looking stealthily about; "I've got regular cat's eyes now, with going to the jungle edge of a night to set and watch traps with the men. I don't see any one about. What do you say to a walk down to the jetty?"

"What for?"

"To hear the crocodiles at play. They have fine games there of a night, splashing and chasing one another."

"Oh no. I'm too tired, really."

"You are a chap! Why, we might take one of the boats and have a row. Go off to one of the prahus, and startle the beggars. No, that wouldn't do, because they might throw spears at us."

"But they couldn't hit us if they did."

"Couldn't they! You don't know. They throw them splendidly. Why, I know fellows here who could hit you with a spear every time at thirty yards, and send the thing right through you."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Ned, with a shudder. "Come along, and we'll get Hamet to give us some coffee."

"And bring us pipes. I say, let's try and smoke."

"Nonsense!"

"Well then, let's go down to the jetty. You can see the fireflies down by the river-side. They look wonderful on the other bank."

"Then let the monkeys and crocodiles look at them. I don't want to look at anything. I'm so tired."

"Then sit in a sampan, and I'll row you about among the crocs."

"I'm not going to sit in Sam's pan or anybody else's pan," cried Ned. "I want to lie down and rest. That elephant has shaken me all to pieces, and I'm so sore; I'm just as if I had been caned all over."

"Perhaps you have," said Frank, laughingly. "Your uncle has been giving it to you. I say though, seriously, I'll ask the rajah to give you a set of native togs. You'd find them so cool and comfortable."

"And look just such a guy as you do."

"You want me to punch your head, Ned. Guy, indeed!"

"Do. Try."

"Not I. Ill-tempered beggar, that's what you are. I say, there are no guards watching us. Let's go and have a game somewhere."

"Yes, a game at coffee and cushions," said Ned. "Here we are.—I say, Hamet, can you give us some coffee, quick?"

The Malay was busy arranging the rifle and guns which had been used that day, and he nodded; but, instead of hurrying to prepare the meal, he laid his hand on Ned's arm.

"Something wrong?" he said. "Trouble?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Ned, carelessly; "nothing much. Why do you ask?"

"Hamet think so," he said, his peculiar pronunciation sounding strange. "The master want to go away back down the river?"

"Eh? Yes, but we can't. They have taken the boat and the men."

"Yes; but Hamet knows where now. Always been try to find boat and men."

"But you couldn't find them. My uncle can't, and you don't know, do you, Frank?"

"No; they took them all right away somewhere. But never mind about them. You can have the rajah's boats when you like, and you don't want to go away."

"How do you know?" replied Ned, thoughtfully. "We might want to go perhaps all in a hurry, and it would be handy to know where our own boat and men are."

"Oh, bother! Don't be shabby, and talk about going. We've had no fun at all hardly yet. Where's that coffee?"

"But it would be handy to know where the boat is kept in case of there being trouble; and I know my uncle has been annoyed at its being so hidden away."

"Yes; the master angry," assented Hamet. "My boat—my men."

"And you know where it is?" said Frank.

"Yes; one of my men came and told me to-night. They all want to go back home, and they are kept at work."

"Yes!" exclaimed Ned, "we ought to know."

"Very well then," cried Frank, rather ill-humouredly; "he knows where the boat is, and when you've done collecting, and we've had no end more trips, you can get your things onboard again, and go."

"But we ought to know too," said Ned, "in case of there being trouble. We might want to go in a hurry."

"Yes; that's right," grumbled Frank. "Well, you are shabby. I haven't had a companion for years now; and as soon as I've got one, you want to take him away."

"But you used to do without one before I came."

"Yes; but then I hadn't had one. I say, never mind about all that. Settle down here till we all go. Perhaps we shall some day."

"Hamet show the young master where the boat is?"

"Yes," said Ned eagerly; and he forgot his weariness in the desire to know that which had been concealed from him.

"Why, I thought you were too tired to stir," cried Frank.

"I wanted you to go down to the river to a boat, and you were gruff and wouldn't come."

"Hamet did not say down by the river."

"Where do you suppose it is, then?" cried Frank, laughing; "up in a tree?"

"Yes; down the river. Hamet knows."

"Let's go and see where it is, Frank," said Ned eagerly.

"What for? I'm too tired now."

"Suppose you and your father wanted to go too."

"We should have a naga and plenty of the rajah's men."

"No, you would not. He would not let you go."

"No more he would," said Frank, thoughtfully. "All right then, if you really mean to go, I'll come. I can guess where it is, though, and it will not be a very nice walk."

"Not far. Soon go," said Hamet. "Then the master know if he want boat."

"Are the men in it?" said Ned.

"No. All on board big prahu."

"Let's go and see, Frank."

"Very well, but you mean 'feel.' Why not wait till morning?"

"No can go then," said Hamet, quickly.

"Very good reason," said Frank, as thoughtful now as his companion. "Yes, we might as well know. My father has often said he wished we had a boat of our own that we could use if we wanted to go away in a hurry, because the rajah had gone in a mad fit."

"Young masters come?"

"Yes. Go on and we'll follow," said Frank; "but look out for the crocs."

Hamet gave them a keen look, held up his hand, and threw himself down, crawled to the doorway, and out on to the veranda.

"Looking out for squalls," said Frank, laughingly.

In a minute Hamet was back.

"Can't see men. All dark. No one. No speak. Keep close to Hamet."

"Yes; we'll follow," said Ned, and after lowering the lamp a little by putting the wick back amongst the oil, they crept out on to the veranda, where all listened for a time and tried to pierce the darkness.

It was very quiet. Only a cry from the jungle, and a faint splash from the river; and descending quickly, Hamet took about a dozen paces at a run, and then stopped for the boys to overtake him.

"No one. No spears," he whispered, evidently fully convinced that his sharp run would have in some way brought him in contact with the guard if they had been there.

Then, going off quickly in the direction of the jetty, he turned off when about half-way there, and led his young companions in and out among the houses, and after passing them, away along the edge of the rice-fields that skirted the village, the boys following in perfect silence for about a quarter of an hour, when Frank whispered: "He's going wrong, right away from the river."

"Hist!" whispered Hamet, and he went on again for another ten minutes, before Frank tried to speak again.

"It's all right," he said. "I know: it isn't where I thought. There's a creek runs right up ever so far among the rice-fields. I never went there, but that's where he is going."

"Hist!" whispered Hamet.

"Oh bother! You need not be so particular now. We're right away from all the houses. Nobody would be down here.—I say, Ned, how do you like your walk?"

"It's very dark and awkward," said Ned; "but I don't mind. I should like to be able to tell uncle where the boat is."

They had now reached a part where trees were growing pretty thickly, and it was only by keeping close to their guide that they were able to make their way onward; but this confusing part of their journey was soon over, for Hamet suddenly stood fast as if puzzled, and uttered a word or two in a tone full of vexation.

"He can't find it after all," cried Frank. "Oh, what a bother, to drag us all this way for nothing."

"Hah!" ejaculated the Malay, and catching Ned's hand, he drew him through the trees at right angles to their former course, and again suddenly stopped.

"Well, which way now?" asked Ned. "Can't you find it?"

"The boat—the boat!" whispered Hamet, and drawing Ned's arm out to full length, he made him stoop a little in the black darkness, with the result that the boy's hand rustled among the leaves of the attap covering.

"It's here, Frank," he said excitedly, and pressing down now with both hands, he felt the boat yield and then stop.

"Yes, that's a boat, sure enough," said Frank, who now felt about the top of the awning. "Yes, and I can feel the poles and oars. Why, this is quite a narrow ditch, only just wide enough to hold it. I've got hold of a rope, too. It's tied up to a cocoa-nut palm; I know the thing by the feel."

"Yes; the boat," whispered Hamet.

"All right. Then now you know where your own boat is, Ned, and when you are tired of us all, you can jump in and say 'Good-bye.'"

"Or take you with us," said Ned. "I don't want to go away from you. Not so ungrateful as you think. Oh, don't! You needn't hug me like that. I say: don't act like a great girl. Ah, Ham—"

Then silence. For Ned felt, as he believed, his companion fling his arms affectionately about him, and so roughly that he bore him back. He felt the silken baju and sarong and the hilt of the kris against him, and then he went down heavily. Frank was evidently playing him some foolish trick, and he had clapped a hand now over his mouth to keep him from making a noise, and betraying their whereabouts.

Then a horrible pang of fear ran through him, for there were smothered sounds and scuffling going on close by, leaves cracked and stalks and twigs snapped, and directly after the hand was removed, and he opened his mouth to cry out, but something soft was thrust in, then a cloth was dragged over his head, his arms were bound to his body, and he felt himself lifted up, and carried by a couple of men.

"A piece of treachery," he thought. "And we trusted Hamet so. Poor Frank! Is he being served the same?"

He got as far as that point, and then the heat and the oppression caused by the gag so nearly stifled him that his brain grew confused; there was a sensation of giddiness and a singing in his ears.

"They are choking me," he thought; and he made a desperate struggle to get his hands to his lips, and then he remembered no more till he felt a sensation of something cool being trickled between his lips. It tasted bitter but pleasant, and in his half-insensible state he swallowed the grateful beverage, and swallowed again and again.

Then forgetfulness stole over him once, and he knew no more, till he opened his eyes and saw the level rays of the sun shining through the open doorway on to the mats that formed the side of the room.

"Going to get up, uncle?" he said, and then he stared, for a couple of dark faces were thrust in to stare at him, and as he looked quickly round, he could not see the guns on the walls, nor his uncle's specimens hanging out of reach of the ants, nor yet his uncle; but close beside him, lying on a mat, the figure of Frank, evidently fast asleep.

The two swarthy-looking faces were withdrawn slowly, and Ned turned, seized Frank by the shoulder, and shook him violently.

"Don't, father!" was the result, as Frank spoke, without unclosing his eyes. "Let me lie a bit longer. My head is so bad."

"Frank, old chap, wake up. Where are we? What does it all mean?"

The boy opened his eyes and sat up, stared round, rubbed himself, and then gazed at his companion.

"I—what does it mean? I—what—I remember now. Some one jumped on me and stuffed something into my mouth. I thought it was you then. It was that Hamet. What does he mean? Here, we're not tied now; let's get out of this. I say, where's my kris?"

He sprang up, and Ned followed his example, both making for the doorway, but only to be confronted directly by four spearmen, who effectually barred the way.

"Eh," said Frank, thoughtfully, "that's it, is it? 'Tisn't one of Hamet's games. Here you," he continued, speaking now in Malay; "what does all this mean? Why are we brought here?"

One of the men answered respectfully enough, and Frank turned from the door to face his companion.

"Those are the rajah's chaps, and that fellow says we are to stay here. I know: they thought we were going to cut off in that boat. Here you, where's Hamet?"

The man addressed looked at him half smilingly, but made no reply.

"He won't speak," said Frank, impatiently. "It's no good to try. You might as well ask questions of a cocoa-nut. I hope they haven't given him the kris. Here, you: tell me this—Hamet—has he had the kris?"

This too in Malay, and the man addressed smiled now, but he would not answer, and Frank gave it up.

"I don't think they've killed him, or they wouldn't look so civil. Perhaps they've only shut him up like us. Well, I'm glad we went to see where the boat was."

"Oh, I say, don't reproach me!" cried Ned. "I did all for the best. Then we've been sleeping here all night. I never knew."

"Not you. They gave us some stuff, I know."

"But my uncle! He'll think I'm lost, or gone into the river, or something. What will he say?"

"Oh, bother your uncle!" cried Frank, petulantly. "I'm thinking about my poor old dad."

Chapter Eighteen.

A Friendly Hand.

The two boys stood staring thoughtfully at each other that bright, sunny morning, for some minutes before Ned spoke again.

"They will not kill us, will they?" he said.

"Kill us? No. I should just like to catch them at it. The brutes! To take away my kris too. There's going to be a row about this as soon as my father knows."

"Then you think it's all a mistake?"

"Of course it is. I shouldn't have wondered if they'd shut you up like this, but you see they've shut up me."

"Well, you're of no more consequence than I am," said Ned, laughing in spite of his trouble and a throbbing head.

"No more consequence than you? Why, I've done as much as I liked about here for ever so long, and the people have treated me just as if I were the rajah's son. It's all your fault."

"I suppose so," said Ned, dismally.

"But if they think they're going to do just as they like, they're mistaken. Here!" he cried in Malay, "water."

There was a bit of a bustle out on the veranda, and two men came in with brass basins and cotton cloths, which they held while, without hesitation, Frank began to bathe his face.

It was a good example, and Ned followed suit, the cool, fresh water feeling delightful to his heated brow.

"Done?" said Frank, as he wiped his hands.

"Yes."

"Take away, and bring breakfast," cried Frank, haughtily, to the men, who bowed and went off with the water and towels.

"I'll let them see whether they're going to treat me like a prisoner," cried Frank.

"I wish I could be as bumptious as you are with them," said Ned, with a faint smile.

"You don't try."

"I'm so anxious."

"Oh, it's of no use to be anxious," said Frank, gazing out of the door, and then through the window with its bamboo lattice-work.

"Which house are we in?"

"I don't know. I was trying to make out, but you can only see trees. I do believe they've taken us up the river somewhere. I don't know, though. These houses are all alike. It isn't the Tumongong's, nor the Muntrie's, nor the Maharajah Lela's. Yes, I believe they've taken us up the river. The old chap has houses in all sorts of places out in the jungle, where he likes to go and hide himself sometimes, but I don't see any fun in his hiding us."

"Then they brought us up here. But how?"

"In a naga, of course."

"But in our sleep, or while we were insensible?"

"Insensible, if you like to call it so. They must have given us some stuff. They've all kinds of dodges of that sort, bless 'em! You should hear Doctor Barnes talk about the poisons they use."

"I should like to—now," said Ned, drily.

"And so you shall—before long. I'll soon get you out of this. Yes," he continued, "this is one of the old boy's places. See how fine the mats are, and how the walls are covered. But never mind now, my head's better, and here's our breakfast."

For the two men entered as the boys came back into the main room opening on to the veranda from an inspection of two side-places beautifully hung and covered with mats. Then a third man entered, and as Frank nonchalantly seated himself on the matting floor, Ned followed his example, and an excellent breakfast was placed before them.

"Not bad for being prisoners," said Frank, as he ate away; while, after the first few mouthfuls, Ned's appetite increased, and he began to enjoy the meal.

"That's right. Ruminate away, old chap. There's nothing to pay. It's the rajah's orders, sure enough, or we shouldn't be fed like this. He isn't going to kill us."

"Think not?"

"Sure of it, unless he's going to fatten us up, and then try whether we're good to eat."

"I wish I had such good spirits as you have."

"Oh, I'm getting better now. Here you, send in the head-man," cried Frank to one of their attendants.

The man bowed respectfully, and withdrew to the veranda, where they heard him speak, and directly after one of the party, evidently a man of some consequence from his silken sarong, came in.

"I want my kris," said Frank.

The man smiled, and shook his head.

"You give it me directly. It was the rajah's present."

"You will run amok," said the man.

"No. I promise. An English gentleman's promise," said Frank.

The man thrust his hand under his silken robe, and produced the handsome weapon.

"An English gentleman does not break his word," he said, giving the kris to the boy.

"Of course he doesn't. Thank you," said Frank, replacing the dagger at his waist, and covering up the hilt with a significant look at the man, who smiled and withdrew, while the boy interpreted the words which his companion had failed to grasp.

The meal being ended, they rose; the men came and cleared away, and as soon as they were alone again, Ned looked at Frank.

"What next!" he said.

"Ah, that's the puzzle! Here we are, like two dicky-birds in a cage, and they won't let us go out. If they keep us shut up long like this, it will be horrid. I wish I could send father word."

"Could we escape?"

"I don't know. We might try. What a muddle, to be sure. They think we were going to run away with Hamet, and we may talk for ever and they wouldn't believe us."

"But we can't sit here and do nothing."

"No; it will be horribly dull. Those Malay fellows like it. They can sit in the sun all day and chew betel. We can't. All we can do is to sit and eat fruit, and you can't keep up doing that always."

Sure enough the party of Malays, ten strong, who acted as their guard in the palm-thatched house, and attended to every want instantly, did sit in and below the veranda in the sun chewing betel, with their eyes half-closed, till, to use Ned's words, it nearly drove him mad.

Frank tried persuasion, bribery, threats, and then force, to get out if only for a walk; but in a patient good-humoured way the chief and his followers refused to let them pass even out on to the veranda; and all the boys knew at last of their position, as the sun went down, was that which they had learned at sunrise: they were in a house somewhere deep in the jungle, shut in by trees.

"Can't we get away when it's dark?" said Ned.

"Get away where?" cried Frank, ill-humouredly. "You ought to know by this time that you can't get through the jungle without men to chop for you."

"But there must be a path by which they brought us."

"Yes; one leading down to the river, where you could get no farther for want of a boat, and trust 'em, they'll watch that night and day. Fellows who know they'll have a kris stuck into them, and be pitched into the river if they let a prisoner escape, look out pretty sharp."

It was rapidly growing dark when Frank, who had tried lying down, sitting cross-legged, standing up, walking about, and

lying on his chest, with his elbows on the bamboo flooring and his chin in his hands, suddenly exclaimed: “Have some more durian?”

“No, thank you.”

“Some mangosteens?”

“No, I’ve had enough.”

“Try some of those little bananas.”

“No—no—no, I couldn’t eat any more fruit.”

“No more can I. Shall we tell them to bring us some curry to finish off with?”

“Oh, I say, don’t talk any more about eating,” cried Ned; “we seem to have done nothing else all day.”

“Well, there wasn’t anything else to do.—I know.”

“What?”

“Let’s catch the jungle fever. Then they’ll be obliged to take us back to the doctor.”

“Nonsense! But I say, Frank, if it’s so miserable and wearisome to be shut up like this for a day, what will it be by-and-by?”

“I don’t know. Never mind by-and-by,” said Frank. “’Nough to do to think of just now. What shall we do?”

“Go to sleep and forget it till to-morrow morning,” said Ned philosophically.

“Come,” cried Frank; “that’s the best thing you’ve said to-day. All right.”

It was now so dark that they had to feel their way into the inner room, where they lay down on the mats with their heads close to the side, and they had hardly settled themselves comfortably when the chief entered the main room followed by two men, one of whom bore a lamp.

The principal Malay looked sharply round, and then said to Frank, who lay on his back with his hands under his head:

"Does my lord want anything else?"

"Yes. You to go and not bother," replied the boy ungraciously.

"Can we bring him anything?"

"Yes; a boat to take us home."

"Shall I leave the light?"

"No; take it away. I'm sleepy."

The man bowed, backed out with his followers, the matting was dropped between the two rooms and then over the doorway as they passed into the veranda.

"That's the way to talk to them," said Frank, peevishly.

"You weren't very civil."

"Well, who's going to be to people who shut you up. It's no use to be 'my lord' without you behave like one. Now let's go to sleep."

Easier said than done. First in the hot darkness came the *ping-wing* of a mosquito, then the restless sound made by the boys fidgeting about, and the low dull murmur of the men talking in the veranda.

"What's that?" said Ned, suddenly.

"Bother! Go to sleep. Only our chaps walking underneath to see if all's safe below. I say," he added, after a pause, "I know what I shall do if they don't let us out soon."

"What!"

"Say I want to learn to smoke—late some evening."

"And make yourself sick."

"No; I'll make them sick. They'll bring a pipe and some burning charcoal."

"To light the pipe?"

"No; it will be to light this jolly old bamboo house. It will blaze up like fun."

"And roast us to death!"

"Not it. We won't be inside. Perhaps we can run away in the scrimmage."

Silence again, and hot, weary, and miserable, the boys lay there in the darkness, till a peculiar sound struck Ned's ear.

"Asleep?" he said.

"No; who's going to sleep if you talk so. Yes, there it is again. Hurrah!"

"Then you did hear that sound?"

"Hear it? Yes. Know what it is?"

"I thought it was a crocodile in the river."

"So it is, and it shows that the river isn't far off. I wish there were none, and then we'd cut down some bamboos and float away to the village. But not to-night. Let's go to sleep."

There was again silence, with the hot air growing unbearable, and Ned had just made up his mind to undress, when from out of the jungle, plainly heard through the thin plaited bamboo and palm walls, came a peculiar cry—*Coo-ow*, *coo-ow*—to be answered from farther away.

"What's that?" said Ned, half aloud, speaking to himself.

"Argus pheasant," said Frank, drowsily. "Oh, I do wish you wouldn't bother. Wonder whether they've got any of that stuff."

"What stuff?"

"To send us to sleep again."

"I wouldn't take a drop," thought Ned; and then in the hot silence he lay thinking about Frank's father, wondering what was going on at the rajah's village, and what his uncle thought of his absence, till weary nature closed his eyes, and even the loud cry of the argus pheasant and the melancholy howl of a tiger prowling about had no effect upon his slumbers.

But a touch effected that which sound had not produced.

For, mingled with his dreams, he had one of a great rat gnawing very softly somewhere by his head, and this kept on for what seemed in his dream like a tremendous length of time before it ceased, and the rat came in through the hole and began walking over his face and sat up on his lips.

That woke him, and he felt the perspiration standing on his brow, for it was no dream: the rat was seated on his lips, and as he lay motionless like one in a nightmare, he felt the little animal glide from his lips to his shoulder, then down his arm to where his hand lay upon his chest, play with the fingers for a few moments, and then grasp them firmly.

It was not a rat: it was a warm soft hand.

A sob escaped from Ned's breast, and he was about to speak, but his hand was pressed firmly, and he returned the grasp, for it felt like the hand of a friend, and if it were, it meant help and perhaps escape.

Turning quickly on his side, he leaned over and touched Frank, who started awake.

"Yes," he said loudly. "What is it?"

The hand was snatched away.

"I told you. Argus pheas— fez— fuz—" snore.

Ned shook him again sharply.

"What's the matter?" he said, thoroughly waking up now.

"Hush! pray. Hist!" whispered Ned; and he pressed his companion's arm, for steps were heard on the creaking bamboo floor, a light shone through between the mat hangings, a dark face appeared and a lantern was held up, so that its dim light fell upon them.

Just then a bright thought occurred to Ned.

"Tell them to bring some water," he said, querulously; and Frank, who grasped the idea that there was something particular in the way, gave the order sharply to the man, who retired directly, and returned in a few minutes with another bearing a vessel of some pleasant, cool drink, of which Ned partook with avidity.

“Leave a fellow a drop,” said Frank; and the half-full vessel was handed to him. “Ah, it ain’t bad,” he continued, as he too drank heartily. “There, be off. Thank you,” he added, in Malay; “the light hurts my eyes.”

The man smiled as he took the vessel, and as Ned watched through his half-closed eyes, he saw that there was the gleam of spears in the outer room. Then the matting dropped behind their jailers, the bamboo floor creaked, the last rays of the light disappeared, and Frank rose softly, crept to the doorway, and peered under the matting.

“They’re all out on the veranda,” he whispered, as he returned. “What was the matter?”

Ned told him, and Frank uttered an excited “Ah!”

Then after a long silence:

“It’s help come. P’r’aps it’s old Hamet. Bah! you were dreaming.”

“No; I am sure.”

“Then,” said Frank, with his lips close to his companion’s ear; “if you were awake, there must be a hole for the hand to come through.”

And as Ned listened, he heard the faint rustling of his companion’s hand moving here and there, and then there was a heavy catching breath, and Frank’s fingers were placed over his lips.

“Big hole under the mat. Behind your head. Hist! some one coming.”

For there was a gleam of light, and then, hardly heard, save for a faint creak of the floor, some one approached, and Ned lay with his arm over his eyes, just making out that the lantern was thrust in, and that a head was visible between the mats and the door, while Frank lay as naturally as if in a heavy sleep, his head half off its resting-place.

The mats fell within again. There was another faint creak, the last gleam of light again disappeared, and the boys lay for a full half-hour without moving, while the silence was now broken by the heavy beating of their hearts.

All at once, after an interval which seemed terrible, the cry of the argus pheasant was repeated, and it sounded terribly near, while at the same moment Ned was conscious of a faint rustling, and the steamy dank scent of the jungle came to his nostrils.

The next moment fingers touched his cheek, were pressed upon his lips, touched his breast, and were gone directly; a slight start from Frank suggesting that he was now being touched. Then followed a faint rustling, and Frank leaned over, put his lips to Ned's ear, and said:

"The hand touched me, then went down to my waist, and it has taken my kris. It's a thief. Shall I call for help?"

At that moment he felt his hand seized and tugged. Then again, and it was drawn under the mat to the opening above their heads.

"It's all right," whispered Frank. "I'm to go first. Snore."

For a few moments the boy did not grasp his friend's meaning, but the idea came, and he commenced breathing hard, and uttered a faint sigh in his agony; for just in the midst of the rustling sound close by him, caused as he knew from a touch by Frank gliding slowly through the opening as if being drawn, he saw a gleam of light beneath the matting at the doorway, and felt that some one was coming again with the lantern.

The difficulty now was to make a noise that should sound natural. If he snored loudly it might seem forced, and if he did not, he felt sure that the rustling, scraping sound would be heard. But fortune favoured him.

Just as he was in despair, there was the sharp *ping-wing* of a mosquito, and he babbled out something incoherently, made a restless movement, and slapped his face quickly twice, as he had often done before in an attempt to slay one of the noxious little insects.

The light disappeared directly, for the listening Malay was satisfied; and as Ned stretched out his hand again, he found that he was alone.

There was a terrible pause now, and in these brief moments the boy began to think that he had been forsaken, when all at once the hand touched him, glided down to his waist, and drew at it firmly.

He yielded and tried to force himself along, but did little, and that little seemed unnecessary, for strong muscles were at work, and he was almost entirely drawn through the opening till he was quite out; his legs sank down gently, and he was lowered till he felt his feet touch the ground, and a hand which he knew directly for Frank's, lay on his lips.

As he was puzzling himself as to how it had been managed, he grasped the fact that some one was gliding down the smooth trunk of a palm-tree which grew close to the house, and to which one of the bamboo rafters had been secured, but whether it was Hamet or some other friend he could not tell.

He had no more time for thinking, for two hands were placed on his shoulders, and a voice he now recognised whispered: "Down—creep—follow."

He grasped the idea at once, and went down on hands and knees, to begin crawling slowly and softly after two bare feet, which he had to touch from time to time to make sure that he was right, while he felt that Frank was behind him, and that he too was touching his boots in the same way.

They were evidently crawling through a tunnel-like track below the undergrowth, a path probably made by a wild beast—unless it was a contrivance to escape from the back of the house in case of emergency—and along this they crawled painfully, with the bushes on either side and overhead. Now a thorn entered hand or knee, now some kind of vegetable hook caught in their clothes, and then they had to creep round some rugged stump of a tree stem to get forward.

The distance was really not great, but it seemed painfully long, and every moment the fugitives were in expectation of having an alarm raised, and seeing the lights of the men in pursuit. But at last, just as Ned had crawled under a bush which scraped and pricked severely, he heard a rustling noise and a peculiar rippling, and was aware of the fact that their guide had risen upright, and that he too could stand.

"Ah," sighed Frank, directly after, "what a—"

"Hist!" came in a low whisper. "Stop here—don't move. Quiet;" and it seemed to Ned that the man lowered himself down till his head was on a level with his companion's knees, and a faint splashing told him where.

They were at the edge of the river, and their rescuer was slowly wading against the stream, holding on by the overhanging boughs.

Then the faint splashing ceased, and the boys joined hands, to stand awe-struck and listening in the thick darkness, and with the knowledge that the water, gliding swiftly by their feet, swarmed with monstrous reptiles, which for aught they knew might seize their guide, or be marking them down for their prey.

Chapter Nineteen.

Down the Stream again.

Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed, and neither of the boys spoke. No sound came from the house, no splashing of the water told that their guide was on his way back.

All at once a shout reached them, followed by another cry, the noise of a struggle succeeded by a splash. Then another splash, and while, with their nerves all on the strain, they listened trembling with excitement, there was another faint gurgling cry; but, instead of being from the direction in which their rescuer had gone, it was close to them in the river, and ceased at once, to be heard again more faintly lower down.

"Oh, Ned," whispered Frank, passionately, "that was poor old Hamet. They've krissed him, and thrown him in the river."

"Can't we help him?" panted Ned, knowing as he spoke that they were only vain words.

"No—no—no," groaned Frank. "And hark! They're coming after us."

For there were shouts, and quite close at hand the glow of torches dimly-seen above the trees, while as the boys strained their eyes in the direction, Ned jerked Frank's arm.

"Hark!" he whispered; "some one's crawling along the path. Can't we run?"

"Can't we fly?" said Frank, bitterly. "It's all over."

“Hist! quick!” came from the water; “get in.”

There was the sound of wood brushing against the bushes, and a dark object rose in front of them.

“The boat!” said Frank, excitedly. “Hurrah! In with you, Ned.”

The latter needed no second admonition, but sprang in against the man who was holding on by the boughs, and as the boy stumbled and fell, Frank followed.

It was none too soon, for there was a sharp rustling behind them, something dark sprang right after them, and another black figure, which had struggled through the tunnel-like passage, rose up; but the boat was loosened, their rescuer struck out fiercely, and the man who had tried to leap on board fell back into the water with a splash, and they heard him dragging himself out just as there was a peculiar thud close to where Ned stood.

“What was that?” he whispered.

“Spear,” said the man, laconically; and they heard him drag the weapon out of the thwart into which it had stuck.

The shouting continued, and it was as if two parties were answering one another; but the sounds grew more distant, and Ned realised that they were gliding down the stream.

“They’ll come after us in another boat,” panted Ned.

“No. No boat,” said the man.

“Oh, Hamet, old chap,” whispered Frank, “we thought they had krissed you, and that we heard you go down the river.”

“No,” said the man, quietly. “Two men keeping boat. Not hurt.”

Ned felt a strange shrinking sensation, and his imagination supplied the facts of the case, as he mentally saw their friend wade in the darkness up to where this boat had been moored, and attack its guardians. He shuddered, and dared think no more, but, happily, Frank began whispering to him just then.

“This is one of the little nagas,” he said. “I know it. The men used it to take us up the river. They did not know it would be all right for us to escape. I say, Hamet, how far is it down to the rajah’s campong?”

"Don't know," said the man quietly, using an oar so as to get the boat's head down stream, and farther from the bank, where the fireflies were still flitting at intervals.

"Well, we shall float down to it. We needn't speak low now?"

"No; only a little," replied the man.

"I say, you were a good one to come and help us. But, I say, you did not kill any one, did you?"

"They tried to kill Hamet," he replied, quietly.

"Oh, Ned!" whispered Frank, with a shudder, "I shall never wear that kris again."

They glided on down in silence for some time before either of the boys spoke again, and then Ned said in a low voice:

"They seized you too, Hamet?"

"Yes, master, and brought us up the river here. I said to myself, 'I will save the young masters,' and they are here."

"But what is to be done now?"

"Go down in the dark to my lord, and say here is a boat waiting. Shall we go back to Dindong?"

"But we could not, Hamet," said Frank. "The rajah's people would hear us, and stop us."

"Perhaps," said the man, quietly. "Heaven knows: but we will try."

"Yes," said Frank, "we will try, unless my father thinks we ought all to stop, and he could bully the rajah. But we will see."

"Yes, we will see," replied Hamet; and there was silence once more for a time, but Ned was too much excited to remain quiet long.

"Are you sure," he said, "that they cannot follow us on shore though they have no boat?"

"Quite sure," said Frank. "They are on the wrong side of the river, and they could not cut a way through the jungle for days

and days. I don't know how far we are up either. Perhaps miles and miles, and they were rowing and poling up all night."

Silence once more fell upon the party, and the boys sat watching the dark wall of trees on either side and listening to the forest sounds, all of which seemed strange and impressive at such a time. Now and then the oar creaked with which Hamet kept the boat's head right, and several times now the boys shrank from the side as there was a sudden swirl and rush through the water, evidently caused by a crocodile disturbed by the passing boat. Then, too, came the cry of a tiger, distant or near, and other peculiar calls from deep in the jungle, sounds that they would hardly have noticed by day, but which were peculiarly impressive now.

And so the time wore on, till, just as Ned was asking if his companion did not think they must be near the campong now, Hamet said in a low voice:

"Don't talk. Words fly along the water. Be heard."

"Then we must be near now?" whispered Ned.

"Yes," replied Frank. "I say, Hamet, keep a good look-out for the prahus, and run her in by the tree where the crocodile was caught. It will be quite black under those boughs."

"Pst!" whispered Hamet, and he ceased dipping his oar in the water, for suddenly a faint light appeared ahead of them not larger than that emitted by a firefly, but the regular beat of oars told that it was in some boat, and unless prompt measures were taken, it was evident that they would be seen, and the efforts of the night thrown away.

Chapter Twenty.

The Rajah's Messages.

Murray woke with a start to find that the sun was well above the trees, and a curious sensation of shame troubled him as he recalled the events of the previous night.

As he started up, he saw that Mr Braine was seated at his little table writing, and as the latter noticed his fellow-prisoner's awaking, he laid down his pen, and held out his hand.

“I was writing a few lines to the doctor,” he said. “I daresay they will take a note for me. I have told him that we are prisoners, to account to my wife for our absence.”

“Tell him—tell them,” said Murray, flushing a little, “to be of good cheer, for we are behaving like prisoners, and watching some means by which we may all escape from this wretched place.”

“And if my letter goes to the rajah first, he may get it interpreted for him, and know what we intend to do.” Murray made an impatient gesture.

“You are right,” he said. “My brain is all confused. We cannot escape without those boys.”

“I am as confused as you are,” replied Mr Braine. “The rajah has had those two taken to hold as hostages. I am sorry to give you pain, but the truth must be told.”

“But why—why?”

“Do you need to ask?”

“No,” said Murray, despairingly. “I know well enough, and in my selfish love for her, I am ready to say she must be saved from such a fate.”

“And my son condemned to death in company with your brother’s child.”

Murray sprang up, and began to pace the room, making the floor wave and the walls quiver with his impetuous tread.

“Tell me what to do,” he said at last. “I feel helpless. I will follow your instructions, and look to you for what is right.”

Mr Braine shook his head sorrowfully, finished his letter, and handed it to Murray to read.

“Yes,” he said; “you cannot say more.”

The letter was sealed, and the chief of their guards summoned.

“I want this letter taken to the doctor,” said Mr Braine.

The man bowed, took the letter, and gave it to one of his men, who went off directly, while Mr Braine stood back against the wall of the room.

"I thought so," he said. "I am fallen from my high position now."

"What do you mean?" said Murray, eagerly.

"The messenger has gone toward the rajah's place, and not to the doctor's house."

Breakfast was brought in to them soon afterwards, but Murray turned from it in disgust.

"Eat, man," said Mr Braine, quietly. "It is a necessity. You may want all your wits and strength before long."

"I said I would look to you for advice," Murray exclaimed; and he sat down and ate mechanically, while Mr Braine went on talking.

"If those boys were here," he said; "matters have now arrived at such a pitch, that I should try and scheme in some way to procure a boat, get all on board, and make an attempt to start away in the darkness."

"Of course!" cried Murray. "They might not see us, but if they did, we are skilled in the use of our weapons, and I swear I could bring down every man at whom I shot."

"Yes," said Mr Braine, thoughtfully; "if driven, we should have to fight. I might win over three or four or half a dozen of the men to whom I have been friendly. I think I could. But no. The rajah has been too cunning for us. He sees that we are likely to try to escape, and he has us on the hip. Murray, I cannot go and leave my boy to the mercy of this demon. Mercy? He does not know the word. I should horrify you, if I told you of all I have been compelled to witness here."

Murray gazed at him with his brow puckered, and then he suddenly started.

"I was to go on another expedition to-day; and, good heavens! here comes the rajah's messenger to say that the elephants are ready. He shall kill me before I'll stir a step. Stop," he cried excitedly—"the elephants. I shall be able to take gun, rifle, and revolver. What if I make the men stop a mile or two away in the

jungle path. Could you contrive to join me with the ladies after dark?”

“And if you could alone over-ride your guard, and I could contrive to join you with the ladies after dark, where should we go? My dear fellow, it is madness. Only out into the mountains to starve. We could not take the ladies, even if we could forsake the boys. Hush! here he is.”

The Tumongong, who had been in close conference with the chief of the guard below in the garden, now ascended the steps, and saluted the two prisoners.

“I bring you a message,” he said, gravely. “The rajah wishes him to wait for a few days before going upon his expedition, and he is to return to his own house. Tell him.”

“The rajah sends word that we are to be separated, Murray,” said Mr Braine. “You are to go.”

“And if I refuse?”

“There is no appeal, man; force would be used. Go patiently, and console yourself with the thought that I am working and planning for you. You must go.”

Murray rose and held out his hand.

“Look here,” he said; “if they have not taken them, I have plenty of arms and ammunition there, and I am ready to stand by you to the death.—Hah!” he ejaculated angrily, as he turned fiercely on the Tumongong, “you know what I said?”

The Malay looked at him fixedly, but said nothing, and Murray shook hands with Mr Braine.

“Is this a ruse!” he said, bitterly. “Is it good-bye for ever? Are they going to make an end of me?”

The Tumongong looked admiringly at the firm manly fellow about to be led off, for aught he knew, to execution, and he spoke quickly to Mr Braine.

“The Tumongong bids me tell you that your life is quite safe.”

“Hah!” ejaculated Murray; and he gave the Malay a grateful look, and went down to where his escort was waiting, the chief and half the guard marching him off back to his house, where at

the first glance he saw that his weapons were still in their places; and here he threw himself down, to try to hit out some plan, while the Malays stationed themselves about the place, and he saw that he was to be strictly watched.

Meanwhile the Tumongong and Mr Braine stood gazing hard into each other's faces.

"Well, what next?" said Mr Braine at last, gazing searchingly into the Malay's eyes.

"You are to join the doctor and his family, and if you value your life, help his highness by reasoning with them, so that his wishes may be obeyed at once."

"He is still set upon this atrocity?"

"Yes; he is determined that the poor lady shall be his wife."

"And if we all refuse and set him at defiance?"

"What good?" said the Tumongong, bitterly.

"I cannot do it, man," cried Mr Braine. "Tell me where are those boys?"

"I cannot—I do not know."

"But—you have always been my friend—is there no way out of this difficulty?"

The Tumongong was silent.

"Yes," continued Mr Braine; "there is that way. His death or imprisonment. Is not the time ripe?"

The Malay made no answer.

"Murray is a strong man, brave as a lion; the doctor, Greig, and I are good shots. We will fight for you to the death."

"It is time to go," said the Tumongong, coldly; and he walked out into the veranda, and gave the guard below an order to be in readiness.

"It would be to the death," he said, quietly, as he returned. "No; we are not strong enough. It is not for want of courage. I could kris him, but it would be too cowardly. If we fought, it

would mean death to your friends and the boys—the ladies left alone to his mercy. There: I am your friend. I have trusted you: my life is in your hands."

"It has been for months," said Mr Braine, quietly; "I have known your secret for long."

"Are you ready?" said the Tumongong, loudly. Then in a low tone—"Bring your weapons."

Five minutes after, the Resident was being marched to the doctor's, where his coming was eagerly greeted; and the guard there being strengthened by the newcomers, the Tumongong looking grave, and then going slowly off, followed by his attendants.

"Frank? Tell me about Frank," cried Mrs Braine, clinging to her husband's hand.

"Mr Murray—Ned?" cried Amy, seizing the other.

"All well as yet," said the Resident, sadly.

"This is true?" whispered Mrs Braine. "You are not deceiving me?"

"You know," he replied, gravely; and the ladies shrank away to weep together, while the doctor offered his old friend his hand.

"Bad news?" whispered the doctor.

"The worst. He insists, and it is to be at once."

"I would sooner kill her," said the doctor, passionately.

"And I would sooner see her dead."

They stood thoughtful and silent for a few minutes before the doctor spoke again.

"I never felt our helplessness so much before. Where is Murray?"

Mr Braine told him.

"A good man the less, but we might perhaps get a message to him to make a dash for us here. Braine, will you fight?"

"To the death."

"We shall be four, with the women to load for us as we fire."

"I am ready, man," said Mr Braine, sadly; "and we shall have the satisfaction of acting as Englishmen in a time of peril, but we can do no more than keep them at bay for a time. Even if we did that, they could starve us out."

The doctor let his hands drop helplessly to his side.

"Yes; that's it," he said. "It is madness. It would only mean so much bloodshed and nothing done."

"He would send every man he had to his death to gain his ends."

"If I had only known—if I had only known!" groaned the doctor; "he would never have recovered from that last illness, I swear."

"Then you swear falsely," said Mr Braine, holding out his hand. "My old friend, John Barnes, never did a treacherous act, and never could."

"Hah!" ejaculated the doctor, wringing the Resident's hand. "Now you disarm me: but a man would do desperate things to save his wife and child."

"Even to giving his life, as I would mine."

They stood by the door in silence, then gazing out into the garden, where a spearman stood at the gate, and the rest of the guard sat about mechanically chewing their betel-nut and sirih-leaf, apparently heedless of the prisoners' presence, but ready to start into action on the instant.

Mr Greig joined them, and the day wore on in sorrow and despair, for their position seemed to be absolutely hopeless, and it was nothing to them that the sun shone down from the pure blue sky on the gorgeous vegetation, whose leaves seemed to shed silver beams of light down amongst the dark shade beneath. Plan after plan was suggested and referred to the ladies, who also made proposals. But the result was always the same. They acknowledged that the rajah, with his Eastern cunning, had checkmated them, and that nothing could be done but wait.

As the day wore on, the doctor's servants went about their work as usual, and Tim Driscol brought in the mid-day meal, and stood looking on in despair to find it untouched.

"Oh, Miss Amy, dear," he whispered, "my heart's bruk intirely to see your pretty eyes all swelled up and red like that. What'll I do, darlin'? Say the word, and if it's to slay and kill him, I'll go."

"Don't—don't talk to me, Tim," she whispered, with the tears flowing fast.

"Not talk to ye—me who carried ye when ye were only half the size ye are! I'll go to the masther, thin."

With the freedom of an old servant, he went out to where the doctor was seated in the veranda, so as to avoid seeing the sad faces within.

"Oh, masther, dear," he said, "what's to be done?"

"I wish I could tell you, Tim."

"It makes a man's heart sore, sir, to see the misthress and her frinds looking like that.—Mr Braine, sir, begging your pardon for intrudin', it's only bekase I want to help. Wouldn't a good fight set it straight, bekase if so, I'm your man."

"Waste of blood, waste of life, and no good done, Tim," said the Resident, sadly. "We are in God's hands. I cannot see that we can stir."

"Four of us and Mister Murray, if we could get at him," mused Tim; "that makes foive, and they're as many hundreds, and got their prahus and boats beside; but I don't know. The old counthry looks a very shmall place on the map, but she could beat the world. Well, the masther has only got to spake, and I'll foight for me misthress and my young lady as long as I can lift a fist."

As the evening drew near, Tim comforted himself by examining and loading the guns and pistols that were in the house, and then replaced them, ready for use at a moment's notice.

But when he had done, he shook his head sadly.

"It's such a whishp of a place to fight in," he said to himself. "Anny one could knock it all over wid a scaffold pole. Why, if it kim to a foight, the bastes could run underneath, and shtick

their spears through the flure. An' I'd like to get one crack at the head of the man I caught doing it."

The dinner-time came, and Tim made another attempt to get the unhappy party to eat.

"And not a bit of fruit," he muttered. "Wonder whether they'd let us get some."

He went and spoke to one of the women who acted as servant, and she readily agreed to go and fetch what was necessary, catching up the second sarong worn by the Malay women as a veil, and used with the two ends of the long scarf-like article of attire sewn together.

With this over her head, she started off, and the guard now looked up sharply, but they had no orders to interfere and prevent one of the women from going out, and in less than a quarter of an hour she returned bearing a basket of mangosteens and bananas.

But it was all labour in vain; the dinner and dessert, so thoughtfully prepared, remained untouched, and the wine, cool and fresh from the evaporating it had received, remained on the table.

It was a lovely starlit night, and after Mr Greig had gone, the doctor and Mr Braine rose from the table to go and walk up and down in the veranda, and wait for the coming of the next messengers from the rajah, for that there would soon be another both felt perfectly convinced.

They had not long to wait before the Tumongong appeared with a small retinue of men, spear-armed as usual, who were halted by their officer at the foot of the steps, while the Malay chief ascended to the veranda to announce briefly that the rajah would honour the ladies with a visit that evening; after which he turned and left the place as he came, the dark figures of his escort filing out through the bamboo gate, looking like shadows in the starlight.

"There is only one thing left," said Mr Braine, as the doctor sat too much stunned by the intelligence, now it had come, to be able to go in and communicate it to his wife and child.

Chapter Twenty One.

Frank's Errand.

"What'll I do? What'll I do?" muttered Tim Driscol to himself as he walked up and down one of the garden paths hidden from his master and his friends, and unheeded by the Malay guard, who contented themselves with seeing that he did not pass out of the gate.

"That pretty colleen! Ow, the covetous owld rip, and him wid a dozen wives at laste, to want our darlin'. What'll I do?—what'll I do? Faix, I'll have me poipe."

He filled the rough bamboo affair with the coarse native tobacco he used, and went on smoking, the bowl glowing as if a ruddy firefly were gliding up and down the garden walk. "Ow, sorrow to uz all!" he muttered. "An' what are all his wives about? Why, they can't have a taste o' sperrit in 'em, or they wouldn't shtand it. Why, if they were ladies from the ould country, and he even thought of taking another, there wouldn't be a bit of hair left on his wicked head. Oh dear! sorrow to me, what'll I do at all, at all?—Who's this. To see wan of the women, I suppose."

He was near the gate where two spearmen stood, and in the full starlight he saw a Malay woman coming up, and as she drew near, she raised her hands beneath the veil-like sarong she wore over her head to a level with her brows, spreading out the plaided silk after the custom of the women, so that the top and bottom hems were drawn parallel, covering her face and forming a narrow horizontal slit through which her eyes alone were seen.

"Yah! Get out. How modest we are. Sure, and ye're an ugly flat-nosed coffee-coloured one, or ye wouldn't be so moighty particular. Want to see one of the women folk, do ye? Well, the gyards'll shtop ye, and send ye about yer bishness, and good-luck to ye."

But the guards did not stop her as she walked quietly up. A woman coming to the doctor's house, that was all; and she passed between them with her face covered, and turned off into the narrow path among the trees leading to the servants' quarters, the men just glancing after her, and then chewing away at their betel.

The consequence was that the next minute the woman was face to face with Tim, who blocked the way in a surly fashion; and as

they stood there in the shadowy path, Tim's pipe bowl glowed, and the eyes seen through the narrow slit gleamed.

"And what do you want?" said Tim, in the Malay tongue.

"Muhdra," was the reply, in a faint voice.

"She's yonder," said Tim. "I daresay you know the way."

"Show me," said the woman softly.

"Oh, bad luck to ye to want to come chattering haythen nonsense to the cook, wid all this trouble on the way," he said angrily, in his own tongue. Then more civilly in Malay, "Come along, then."

He led the way, and the woman followed till they had passed another sentry, when he felt his arm gripped.

"Don't flinch—don't speak. Tim, don't you know me?"

"Masther Frank! Oh murther!"

The man staggered in his surprise as he uttered these words, but the quick Irish wit grasped the situation directly, and he said aloud in the Malay tongue something about its being a fine warm night, and then led the way into the dark room he called his pantry, though it was little more than a bamboo shed, and excitedly clasped the boy to his breast.

"Masther Frank, darlin'! Oh, Heaven be thanked for this!—Ah, ye wicked young rip, to frighten us all as ye did."

"Hush, man, silence! Don't, Tim. Why—my face is all wet."

"Whisht! nonsense, boy. That's nawthing. Only a dhrop o' water. It's so hot. But quick! An' good-luck to ye for a cliver one. To desave us all like that!"

"Where is my father? He was not at home."

"Faix no; he's up-stairs. But where have ye been?"

"Don't ask questions. Are they all right?"

"Oh yes, all right; and all wrong too. There's me news, boy. The rajah's going to marry Miss Amy, and we're all prishners."

“I thought so,” whispered Frank. “But prisoners?”

“Oh yes; ye saw the gyards.”

“Where is Mr Murray?”

“Shut up at home wid sax or eight min to take care of him.”

“Go and tell my father I’m here. No; take me up to them at once.”

“Oh, murther! no, Masther Frank! Don’t think of it, boy. Iv ye go up, the ladies’ll all shquale out, and yer mother go wild wid sterricks. Sure an’ Masther Bang-gong’s just been to say the owld chap’s coming to see the ladies to-night.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Frank.

“But where have ye been, lad?”

“Go quite quietly, and tell my father or the doctor I’m here.”

“Yis.”

“And Tim, have you got anything to eat? I’m starving.”

“Lashins, me dare boy. Help yerself, for the sorrow a taste would they take in the parlour.”

Tim hurried up, passed through the main room, listened for a moment or two to the murmur of the ladies’ voices in one of the inner places, and then crept out into the veranda, carrying a tray with a metal bottle and two cups, which he made to jingle loudly for the guard to hear.

“No, no, my man,” said the doctor. “It’s very thoughtful of you, but no.—Braine, will you?”

“No, no,” said the Resident; and then he uttered a gasp, for Tim’s lips were at his ear, as he stood behind his seat, and said softly:

“Whisht, Mr Braine, darlin’: don’t make a hurroo. Masther Frank’s come, and he’s below.”

There was a dead silence for a few moments, and then Mr Braine said in a forced voice:

"No, no drink, Tim.—Doctor, come in and give me a cigar."

He rose, and walked quietly in with the slow careful acting of one who knows that his every action is watched, and, wondering at his friend's change, the doctor rose and followed.

"Get the cigars and matches," said Mr Braine, quietly; and then in a quick whisper: "Be firm, man, and act. Light a cigar. Frank has come back."

"Thank God!" muttered the doctor, and he pressed his friend's hand before getting cigars and matches, and they stood where those in the garden could see, striking a match, and holding it between them as they lit their cigars—great coarsely-made ones of the native tobacco.

"Now, Tim, where?" said Mr Braine.

"In my room, shure, sor."

"Sit down there and smoke," said Mr Braine, in a low tone. "Take both cigars, man, and keep them alight, changing your position as you change the cigars."

"And desave the haythens. Yes, sor, I undherstand," said Tim, taking the cigars as the gentlemen prepared to descend, "and a moighty plisant way of desaving 'em," he muttered to himself, as he began smoking away; while the next minute Frank was in his father's arms, hurriedly telling him of his adventures.

"And when we heard the naga coming up the river before daybreak, we pulled in under the trees and bushes, just below the stockade," he said in conclusion, "and there we've been all day, not daring to stir, and even when it was dark we were afraid to move, till I thought of putting a sarong over my head, and coming like this. I passed lots, and no one spoke to me."

"And the boat?"

"Safe under the trees with Ned and Hamet."

"Is it big enough to hold us all?" said Mr Braine.

"Plenty."

"Heaven has sent us help!" said Mr Braine fervently. "Barnes, we must by some means get all on board to-night, and trust to the darkness to run down the river."

“But the rajah’s visit?” said the doctor.

“Ah! I had forgotten that,” said Mr Braine, with a groan; “the rajah and our guards; but with help and ease of mind coming like this, we must not despair. Now, doctor, go back up-stairs. One moment—your women-servants?”

“They are to be trusted.”

“Then go and set my wife’s mind at rest. Tell her our lives depend upon her being calm. There must be no excitement, or we shall excite suspicion. Implore your wife and child to be careful.”

“And Murray and Mr Greig’s?”

“Another obstacle?” exclaimed Mr Braine. “Never mind; one thing at a time. We may get the women to the boat, then we might drop down opposite to Murray’s place and cut him out. But we shall see. Go on, and in a minute or two I’ll bring up Frank.”

The doctor went up, passed Tim, who was carefully keeping his two points of light glowing at a distance from each other, and communicated his tidings to the ladies, with the effect that Mrs Braine fainted dead away, but to recover directly, and eagerly whisper that she would be firm and not make a sound.

She kept her word, weeping silently over her son, while Mrs Barnes and Amy both clung to the lad’s hands, in the faintly-lit room.

“Quick!” said Mr Braine, whose ears were preternaturally sharp. “Frank, keep here in hiding. You three come out when the doctor summons you. Come, Barnes, back to our cigars. The rajah.”

They glided back into the dark warm room, after adjuring those they left to be silent, and as they took their places they could see the gleam of lights through the trees, the sight of which had roused their guard into making the sound which had warned the Resident.

“Light both the lamps, Tim,” said Mr Braine; “and be guarded. The rajah is coming.”

The man obeyed, and as the lights shed a softened glow through the place, the guards could see the doctor and Resident seated back smoking calmly.

"What are we to say?" said the doctor, huskily.

"Surprised at his treatment—ask for a little time—the lady startled by the unexpected demand—diplomacy—diplomacy. Let him go back thinking that you will yield."

And as these last words were uttered, the lights drew near and lit up the swarthy faces of the rajah's guards and sword-bearers filing into the grounds.

"Whatever you do, be careful. Don't seem to yield easily. We are hurt by his treatment, mind."

There was no time to say more, for the escort was already at the foot of the steps, on each side of which they formed up in a picturesque group, the lanterns they bore lighting up the showy costumes and displaying the rajah in his European uniform.

The two Englishmen advanced into the veranda to receive him, and as he mounted alone, he smiled, and waited to be asked into the room, evidently quite confident of his safety with his guard so near.

As soon as he was seated, he placed his glittering sword against his knee, and his plumed cap beside it, drawing himself up and glancing toward the doorway to make sure that he was in full sight of his guard. Then, turning to the doctor, he said in English: "Theeee—laidees."

The doctor bowed, and crossed to the inner door, which he threw open, and the prisoners came out looking pale and calm, to be received with smiles and motioned to take their seats, while the gentlemen remained standing.

"Tell them this is only a short visit," said the rajah. "To-morrow shall come, not to return alone. The lady will be with me, and we shall go to the mosque. Then my English wife will return here no more."

The Resident translated the rajah's words, though the task was needless, for all present followed him pretty well.

Then the doctor spoke, as their visitor keenly watched the effect of his words and fixed his eyes upon the shrinking girl before

him. Her father's words were much as had been arranged, and the rajah listened to the interpretation patiently enough.

"Yes, yes," he said; "you are her lather. I understand. But you will be rich, and like a prince here. It is a great honour to your child. Tell him what I say."

Mr Braine repeated the rajah's words formally, and then the visitor rose, bowed and smiled with good-humoured contempt, and ended by drawing a ring from one of his fingers as he rose, walked toward Amy, and placed it upon her hand, after which he made a profound obeisance and moved toward the door.

"One moment, your highness," said the doctor. "We are your old servants and friends. You treat us as prisoners."

"No, no," he said, on Mr Braine repeating the words. "I honour you. It is a guard for my wife. Not prisoners. After to-morrow, no."

"But our English friend, Murray. Your highness will let him join us?"

The rajah, caught the name Murray, and his face grew black as night, and without waiting for the interpretation, he made an angry gesture in the negative.

"But my son and his young friend," said Mr Braine, watching him narrowly, to ascertain whether the flight was known.

The rajah gave him a meaning look, and laughed.

"After to-morrow," he said, "they will come back."

His face was all smiles once again, and he bowed to Amy, passed into the veranda, descended, and the little cortege moved out of the shady grounds. The lights slowly disappeared among the trees, while the doctor dropped the matting hangings over the door to hide the interior of the house from their guard, after which he turned to encounter the pleading face of his wife as Amy threw herself sobbing upon his breast.

Mr Braine stood looking on for a few moments in silence. Then, in a cold, stern voice, he said:

"Go back to the inner room and pray for our success. Then you have sarongs, make yourselves as much like the Malay women as you can."

"Then we shall escape?" cried Amy, joyously.

"Heaven knows!" said the Resident. "We shall try. Ah, thank goodness, here are the Greigs;" and unchallenged by the guards, Mr Greig and his wife came up to the house.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Tim's Happy Idea.

"Come up here, Driscol," said the doctor; and as Tim appeared Frank came to the inner doorway to creep into a corner, where he was in shadow, and could listen to what was said.

"Now, Braine," said the doctor. "We are all waiting, what do you propose?"

"I have nothing to propose. We have a guard of sixteen outside. If we could get by them, we might reach the river in the darkness. Can you tell me how to proceed?" The doctor was silent. "Frank, can you suggest anything?"

"No, father; only to fight."

"Madness, boy. Help would come directly."

"I have an idea," said the doctor, "if it would act. I should do it unwillingly, but it is our only hope that I see. Stop!—Driscol, can you help us?"

"Sure, I've been thinking hard, sor, and all I can get hold of is one idaya, and that's as shlippery as an oysther out of its shell."

"Speak, man, what is it?"

"To wait a bit, and thin go round wid a thick shtick and bate all their heads."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Mr Braine.

"That's what I said to meself, sor, for I saw while I was quieting one, he would make a noise, and—ye see if I could hit all their heads at wance."

"Hush! silence!" said the doctor. "Braine, the only thing I can propose is to fill a vessel with wine and—drug it."

"No," said Mr Braine, sternly. "For one thing they are Mussulmans, and it is forbidden; some would not drink. For another—"

"They'd be suspicious, and would not touch it," said Frank, quickly.

"Quite right, Frank," said his father.

"Then if I medicated some cigars," whispered the doctor.

"Oh, then," said Frank, "they'd roll them in the waists of their sarongs, and save them to cut up and smoke in their hubble-bubbles to-morrow."

"Yes; it is hopeless," said the doctor, despondently; and there was a long silence broken by Tim.

"Whisht! masther dear," he said, "would the rat poison taste much?"

"Poison? No. Who said a word about poison? I should only send them to sleep."

"Oh!" said Tim, "a short slape; not the very long one. Would it taste, sor?"

"No, my man; why?"

"Thin, bedad, I have it. Ye nivver touched the shmall cakes for dinner: put some of the stuff into thim, and I'll shtale out with a whole trayful and a bottle of wine from down below, jist as if it's me being civil to the bastes, and I'll offer 'em the wine, and they won't touch it, but I will, and dhrink of it heartily. They won't think there's anny desait in it then, and I'll offer 'em the cakes, and ate a shpare one or two that I'll kape on one side."

"Tim, you're a scoundrel!" cried Mr Braine, excitedly.

"Sure, that's what my mother always said, sor," replied Tim, modestly; "but, masther dear, ye wouldn't put any rat poi—shlaping stuff, I mane, into the wine."

"And rob ourselves of our right hand?" said the doctor, warmly. "No!"

"Thank ye, sor," said Tim. "I thought I'd say that, for ye may remimber once making a mistake, and nearly cut off your right hand—I mane meself."

"It was not a mistake, Tim, but an experiment with one of the native medicines."

"Faix, it just was, sor, and I'll niver forget it. But ye'll look loively, sor. There's plinty of the little cakes iv Masther Frank didn't ate thim all."

"I did not touch them, Tim," said Frank, eagerly.

"Then the day's our own, sor. You come down and docthor 'em, and I'll go and prepare the syle for the sade."

"What are you going to do?" said Mr Braine, quickly.

"Only shmoke me poipe in the gyarden, sor, and soother and blarney them over a bit. It'll kim aisier, thin, to go in and fetch a bit and sup from the panthry, and not be so suddint like. They're such desayving thayves of the world, they suspect everybody."

Tim went down, and the doctor busied himself at a medicine-chest for a few minutes before following him.

"Now, Greig, help me," said the Resident, turning down the lamps a little. "Frank, keep out of sight in case we are watched. You know where the doctor keeps his ammunition."

"Yes, father," was the reply, and the pair busied themselves in examining revolvers and guns, placing ammunition ready for flight, and finally arming the ladies, and thrusting an ornamental kris from the walls into their belts.

Then weapons were placed ready for the doctor and his man, their arrangements being about complete as the former returned looking pale and anxious.

"Ah," he said, on seeing the preparations, "that's right. It's hard to leave all our treasures and collections."

"Yes; but we must think only of ourselves."

"Of our wives and children," said Greig, quietly.

"Yes. But, tell me, what have you done?"

"Put a strong opiate in every cake."

"But those who take it—does it mean risk to their lives?"

"No. The worst that can happen may be a day or two's illness after. That is not what I fear," said the doctor, significantly.

"What then?"

"The rajah's punishment of the poor wretches."

"Hah!" ejaculated Mr Braine, "but we must be selfish here for others' sake."

A few more preparations were made by Frank's suggestion, every scrap of food from below being placed in a couple of baskets; the two women who assisted Tim in the house having gone for the night some time before.

"Now," said the doctor, "what next? Matches and a lantern."

These were placed ready; a few comforting words said to the ladies—who were now calm, firm, and helpful, looking strangely Malayan in their garb, for they had trenched upon a store which, they had saved up as mementoes of their sojourn in the jungle—and then all sat down to listen and wait, the strange forest sounds coming faintly to their ears, mingled with the occasional mutterings of their guard.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Ned is Obstinate.

Tim acted his part well. He strolled out from his "panthry," and sauntered along to where the chief of the guard stood gazing at him sternly; and trusting to the pretty good smattering of Malay he had picked up, he said quietly: "Going to be on guard all night?" The Malay nodded.

"Sorry for you," said Tim, beginning to fill his pipe. "I did six months' soldiering myself when I was a mere lad, and it was hard work keeping awake on sentry-go."

He struck a match and lit his pipe, lighting up the scowling face of the guard and his own good-humoured phiz.

“I say,” he continued, “next boat you gentlemen overhaul, look sharp after the matches, if they’ve brought any up from Malacca, for we’re getting short, and I don’t care to take to the flint and steel.”

Tim nodded and went on, smoking, to make the round of the place, stopping to say a word or two to the other armed men in his easy good-tempered way, seasoning his remarks with a joke or two, while the lightning flickered in a bank of black clouds across the river.

By degrees he made his way back to the head-man, and began to talk confidentially.

“I say,” he said, “I suppose we shall all be big people now, when the rajah has married me young lady.”

The Malay laughed softly, contemptuously. “Oh yes,” he said. “Perhaps he’ll make you Muntrie or Tumongong.”

“Get out, making fun of a boy,” said Tim, good-humouredly. “Well, good-luck to you, I’ve nearly finished my pipe. I’m tired, and going in to sleep. Take care of us. Good-night.”

The Malay wished him good-night, and Tim turned to go, but stopped and pulled out his pouch.

“Have a bit o’ tibakky!” he said. “It’s the master’s. Some the rajah gave him.”

The Malay nodded eagerly, and Tim gave him two or three pipefuls.

“Here,” he said, “I’ve got a lot. The master don’t like it, and tells me to help myself. I’ll fetch a bit for the other boys.”

Tim lounged off, and at the end of a few minutes, with a small basket made of thin strips of bamboo, and still smoking, sauntered up to the head-man.

“Call ’em up,” he said, in a low voice. “Don’t talk loud; they’ve not gone to bed yet indoors.”

The Malay gave Tim a peculiar searching look, but the Irishman was tapping the ash out of his pipe and putting it in his pocket, after which he took a brass box from the basket just as the Malay uttered a low guttural sound, and his men stole up silently one by one.

"Whisht!" said Tim. "Tibakky;" and he divided about half the contents of the box, the leaf being eagerly received and deposited in a fold of the sarong.

"Whisht!" said Tim again, after a stealthy glance back at the house, and putting the tobacco back, he drew out a bottle. "Will you drink the new ranee's health?"

His question was received in utter silence.

"No!" said Tim. "I thought you wouldn't, and I'm sorry for your religion. Well, I will. Long life to my darling young misthress!"

He took out the cork, passed his hand over the top of the bottle, and then applying it to his lips, took a long gurgling draught, swallowing pretty well a pint before he lowered the flask, the Malays gazing longingly at him as he drank.

"I'm sorry for you, boys," said Tim; "for that's a drop of good stuff," and he replaced the bottle. "But, look here," he said, with a laugh, "left from up-stairs;" and holding up the basket, he took out a cake or sweet of the kind cleverly concocted by the Malay women, and began to eat. "Any one do a bit in this way!" he continued, with his mouth full.

If he had offered the bottle now, they would have drunk from it to a man, and after a momentary pause the chief of the guard took a cake from the basket, broke off a scrap, removed his betel-nut, tasted the sweet, took a good bite, and uttered a low guttural order; which resulted in each man taking a cake, the last man growing excited from the belief that they would not go round; but there was just one each, and the head-man spoke again, with the result that his men went back to their posts eating greedily, while Tim stood in the darkness trembling with excitement.

"Well," he said, fearing to betray himself; "now then for my snooze. Good-night!"

The Malay laid his hand upon his shoulder. "Stop!" he said, "let me taste from the bottle."

"Don't apologise," said Tim, wilfully misunderstanding him. "I was always the man to respect any one who stood by his religion, and so was my mother before me. Good-night."

Tim turned into the house. "Oh, murther," he muttered, returning to his own tongue; "the wine might have shpoilt the docthor's rat poison. What an eshcape!"

"Well?" whispered Mr Braine and the doctor in a breath, as Tim appeared looking white and scared.

"Oh, they've tuk it, ivery mother's son of thim, gintlemen; an' if they all die, docthor, don't go and say it was me doing when I'm not here."

"Die? Nonsense!"

"Oh no, it isn't, sor, and I've made a dhreadful mistake."

"Mistake? Failed?" cried Mr Braine, horrified.

"Sure no, sor, I haven't failed; I've succayded too much."

"But you said you had made a mistake, man."

"Yes, sor. I tuk wan of the cakes meself."

The announcement was received with a blank look of despair.

"Sure sor, don't stand looking at me loike that, please. Thin aren't ye going to give me an anecdote?"

"No antidote would be available, my poor fellow. But how could you make such a blunder? I showed you so carefully."

"Sure ye did, sor, but I was a bit flurried."

"You ate a cake?"

"Oh yes, sor," said Tim, dismally. "I ate wan, and I didn't taste the shtuff till it was down."

"But you couldn't taste it, man."

"Sure, sor, but I did quite sthrong," groaned Tim, sinking on one of the divans.

"But tell me, how do you feel?"

"Horrid bad, sor; shlapy, and it's creeping up me legs. Ye'll have to carry me or lave me behind."

"Whatever can we do?" said Mr Braine.

"Perhaps exertion and the night air will revive him," said the doctor. "I'll give him something too."

He hastily mixed a draught, which Tim drank gratefully, and then lay back with Frank supporting his head.

"How long will it be before the potion acts on the men?" said Mr Braine.

"Very few minutes before it begins, but of course not on all alike. Some one must steal down and watch."

"I'll go," said Frank, and creeping down to the lower rooms—the sheds used by the women and Tim—he stood close to the door, and then by degrees from bush to bush, on and on, till in less than half an hour he was back with the expectant group.

"They are all sleeping heavily," he said. "How is Tim?"

His father pointed to the divan, where the man lay apparently insensible, with Mr Greig bathing his head.

"It is all over," said Braine, sadly; "we cannot leave the poor fellow."

"Oh!" cried Frank, dashing at the man and shaking him violently.

"All right. Moind me head, Masther Frank! I'm ready, sor."

"Can you walk?"

"Can I walk? Hark at him," said Tim, drowsily. "I'll show ye all."

"Here, we'll try," said Mr Braine. "Take these. Put the revolver in his breast. Can you carry a gun, man?"

"For sartain," said Tim, stupidly.

"Then ready. Not a moment is to be lost," whispered Mr Braine. "Lead the way, Frank, and if we by chance are separated, every one is to make for the tall clump of trees this side of the stockade."

"And chirp like this," said Frank, imitating a bird. "That will bring the boat."

"Then forward. Not a word."

They stepped out on to the veranda, and gazed down into the black darkness, with the lightning still quivering and flickering in the distance.

All was perfectly still in the garden for a few moments, and then there was a heavy stertorous breathing, which sounded louder as they descended and passed quickly on down to the gate; Tim staggering a little, but keeping step for step with the doctor, who supported him by the arm.

Frank led as he had been instructed, and heard the heavy breathing to right and left; but it was not until he reached the entrance that he really came in contact with the guards, for there lay one right across the path, and another had his arms folded on the bamboo top rail of the gate, and hindered further progress.

To step over the prostrate man was easy, but this other completely barred the way. Frank waited till his father came up, and he heard him draw his breath heavily, and stand thinking.

"We cannot stand over trifles now," said Mr Braine. "Desperate remedies are our only hope;" and, after hesitating a moment or two, he gently passed his arm round the soft lithe body of the Malay, lifted him from the gate, and let him sink to the ground beside his companion.

Those were critical moments, and all looked on trembling; but the man only muttered a little, and, with a heavy sigh, went off into a deeper sleep.

The party stood listening for a few moments, and then started for the stockade, in and out among houses and gardens, where all was silent save the occasional cackle and movement of the game-fowls many of the people kept. Twice they heard voices, but the place seemed to be pretty well plunged in slumber, and, with his spirits rising moment by moment, Frank hurried on, with Amy close behind him, till the houses were left behind without a soul being encountered; but now, as they neared the river, there were other dangers to fear.

Of the reptiles Frank thought little. The danger was from the naga that was always patrolling the stream night and day, especially the former, on the look-out for trading vessels trying to slip by in the darkness and in the silence of the night.

Knowing how sound travelled, he was in agony lest there should be word or whisper to excite the Malays' suspicion.

But fortune favoured them. He caught sight of the dark hulls of the prahus, but the boat was invisible, and as Frank crept on along the river-bank listening to the strange sighings and splashings of the river, he at last made out the great tree beneath which he had rescued Ned from a horrible death, and a quarter of a mile farther on, through the wet untrampled shore-growth, where twice over he heard the rushing and splash of some reptile, he paused by a thick bed of reeds and grass, with bushes overhanging the river's edge.

Here he stopped till the others joined him—Tim still staggering on with the doctor's help—and then moved forward again by a tall palm.

He listened, and everything but the splashing of fish and reptiles was still. There was no dipping of oar or creak of bamboo against wood.

Suddenly a low chirping sound rose from the midst of the party, and was answered from a dozen yards distant. Then came the rustling of some one forcing his way through the bushes, and Ned stood among them, silently grasping hand after hand.

"I was afraid they'd got you, Frank," he said.

"No; it's all right."

"But where's my uncle?"

There was silence, and then Mr Braine explained their position.

"I see," said Ned, firmly; "but we cannot stir from here without him."

"No; we are going to get him out at any cost."

"How?" said Ned.

"Hist! speak lower," whispered Mr Braine. "Drop down in the boat to the point nearest his house, and there part of us land."

"But you say he is guarded."

"Yes. The case is desperate. But, first of all, let's get on board."

"No," said Ned; "you are going to forsake him. I will not go."

"I give you my word as a gentleman, sir," said Mr Braine, coldly.

Ned said no more, but acting as guide, led the way down to the boat, where, with Hamet's help, the ladies, arms, and ammunition were placed on board, and they all followed after, literally rolling Tim in over the side, to lie perfectly helpless at the bottom.

"Safe so far," said Mr Braine, as they crouched together in the fore-part, while the ladies were under the thatch awning shivering with dread.

"Catch hold, Ned. You too, Hamet," whispered Frank, who, remembering his own sufferings, thrust some food into the fasting pair's hands.

"Now," said Mr Braine, "there is no better plan. About three hundred yards below the big tree, by that cluster of palms."

"The prahus are near there," said Frank.

"A full hundred yards lower, boy," said his father. "You lads will keep the boat while we land."

"I am coming too," said Ned.

"No," whispered Mr Braine, angrily. "Take my orders, and keep the way of retreat open for us."

"I am not going to leave my uncle in that danger without coming to help," said Ned, stubbornly.

"Then come," said Mr Braine, angrily, but admiring the boy's determination all the same. "Now then, revolvers only, and they are only to be used if cunning fails. How many do we muster if it comes to a fight?"

"Hamet will come, father," said Frank.

"To save master? Yes," said the Malay, quietly.

"Four, Ned five," said Mr Braine. "Oh, if that poor fellow had not made the mistake. He is brave as—as—"

"An Irishman," said the doctor.

"Yes, as an Irishman or a Scot."

"But I don't think he's so very bad, father," whispered Frank.—"Here, I say, Tim. There's a fight."

"Foight? Eh!" said Tim, struggling up, and rubbing his eyes.

"Hush! whisper."

"But who said there was going to be a foight?"

"I did."

"Where? Come on!"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. He's right enough, father."

"Then push the boat carefully out of this wilderness, and in Heaven's name let's go."

Hamet unfastened a rattan line, and the boat began to glide downward at once, with bush and leaf scratching and rustling against side and thatch, till they were clear of the dark vegetable tunnel into which it had been thrust the previous morning. Then taking a pole, the Malay punted it along close in-shore, thrusting the metal-shod staff quietly down till, when they had gone about a hundred yards in the profound darkness beneath the trees, the point struck on something hard, when instantly there was a tremendous eddying swirl, the boat rocked, and Hamet said quietly, "Crocodile."

A couple of minutes later Mr Braine pointed to the spot where he wished to land, and the boat was cleverly brought in close to the bank, here so steep that it lay invisible from the shore, the overhanging boughs hiding it from any one upon the river.

"Now, Frank," whispered his father, "there must be absolute silence. Not a word must be spoken. You and Mr Greig must keep the boat. You will be sure to hear us coming, so stand ready to cast off."

"Yes, father."

"Right," said Greig.

"And if matters come to the worst, let the boat drop down the river. Save the ladies, and try to get help."

"Yes, father," said Frank huskily. "Are you going to tell them what you are about to do?"

"No. Now then, ashore! Quick!"

One of the first to step quickly and silently out of the boat was Tim, and a minute later the boat-keepers saw the party disappear into the darkness; and then Frank sat there listening to a faint sigh or two, the rippling of the water beneath the boat, and trying to make out the shape of the nearest prahu.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Up the River.

A halt was made as soon as the little party were well away from the boat, for arms to be examined, and a plan of attack arranged.

Hamet listened respectfully till it had been decided that the only way was for the party to creep up silently, seize and bind the guard, and then retreat at once—a rather reckless proceeding, but one that seemed to them the most likely to succeed—and then he whispered a few words to Ned.

"Hamet proposes, sir, that we should try to communicate with my uncle from the back of the house or the roof. He says he could climb the durian tree and break through quietly."

"Then let him try," said Mr Braine, eagerly. "We will be ready to support him and attack if it is necessary."

Hamet drew in his breath at these words, and assuming the lead, took the party round through garden after garden, till they were only a few yards from the house, where they stood listening to a low, murmured conversation, which told where the guards had stationed themselves; and then going down on hands and knees, he crept away from them, leaving the others breathless with excitement, and listening for the alarm.

In a couple of minutes the Malay was back to catch Ned's hand and draw him away, to put in force the tactics which had enabled him to rescue the two lads on the previous night.

Ned followed him with beating heart, till they were beside one of the palm-tree posts which supported the house, and then submitting to the Malay's busy hands, he found himself placed with his arms grasping the post and his body curved a little, and comprehending the man's plans, he stood firm, while Hamet reached up as high as he could, planted one bare foot on the boy's back, the other on his shoulder, and then the bamboo supports of the matting walls creaked softly, as with the agility of a monkey he passed along to where the durian tree stretched a branch over the roof, upon which, by the help of the bough, he managed to swing himself, and then all was silent again.

Thump—thump—thump—thump. Ned felt his heart beat as he listened to the murmuring of the Malay guards' voices which came under the house, and as the boy stood there, his ears were strained for the next noise Hamet might make, wondering the while whether the guard would hear.

He was so near the spot where Murray would be lying, that he felt he had only to raise his voice a little to announce their presence, but he dared not speak. Then he started, for he knew that Hamet was at work, for there was a faint rustling, with an occasional crack, as of the breaking of a leaf; and as the boy stood there in the darkness, he knew that Hamet was cautiously cutting through the attap thatch, scrap by scrap, for now little pieces no bigger than elm-leaves began to fall about him.

This went on for what seemed to be an interminable length of time, and he began wondering how a Malay who knew so well how his fellow-countrymen made a roof, could be so long in making a hole big enough for a human body to pass, when a familiar voice close to his ear, as it seemed to him, exclaimed:

"Who's there? Stop, or I fire."

"Oh, uncle!" panted Ned to himself; "how could you be so stupid."

Then he threw himself down, for there was the quick movement of feet, the familiar creaking of the bamboo steps in front, that he had so often ascended and descended, and then his uncle's voice said loudly:

"Nothing wrong. Water—water!" And as if to himself—"I don't suppose they understand a word."

But it was evident that they comprehended the last word, for the bamboo floor creaked, and Ned plainly heard the sound of

some one drinking. Then came the words, "Thank you;" the floor and steps creaked again, and after all had been silent for what seemed to be half an hour, the boy rose to his feet again, conscious that Hamet was hard at work, for the scraps fell fast.

Then came a pause, the faint creaking of the floor as if Murray had turned round, a dull expiration of the breath as of some one breathing very hard; and as Ned stood grasping the pillar, he felt that the slight house was quivering slightly.

Ned's heart beat now fast, and in imagination he saw his uncle hanging from Hamet's hands and being drawn upward toward the sloping roof.

Another creak, a loud rustle, and he knew that he had climbed—half drawn—through the palm thatch, and the pair were about to descend.

"Quick, quick!" thought Ned, "before they hear you;" and longing to go to Murray's help, he strained his head back and tried to pierce the thick darkness.

All at once there was an ominous crack, a violent rustling sound, and then a sharp jerk or check.

Murray had slipped, and was coming down fast, but he had saved himself, and from overhead now came a sharp whisper, "Quick!"

The command was needed, for the guard had taken the alarm. There was the rush of feet, a louder scrambling from above, and Hamet and Murray dropped down into the arms of the guards who came running under and round the house.

The struggle had commenced, and though Murray fought bravely, he had been taken at a disadvantage, and the help had come, apparently, in vain.

For, realising that the attempt had failed, Mr Braine and the doctor rushed to the assistance of the others, and a fierce mêlée ensued in the darkness, wherein the fresh comers, who dared not use their revolvers for fear of injuring friends, devoted their principal efforts to keeping the enemy from using their krises, weapons admirably suited for a close encounter.

It was only a matter of a minute or two.

"Murray—is Murray there?" cried the doctor.

"Yes," came from the ground. "I'm held—two men. Never mind me—save yourselves."

The fierce struggle went on almost in silence, for the Malays as they wrestled with the Englishmen, sought more to take prisoners than to strike, and uttered a low growling noise, more like that of wild beasts than men.

"It's of no use," whispered the doctor. "Braine, Ned, Hamet, make for the boat."

"Yes, quick! escape!" cried Murray, after a tremendous effort to get free.

"No, no," cried Ned, hoarsely, wresting his arm from the doctor's clutch; and with a short run he sprang upon one of the men who were holding Murray down.

The sudden action and the weight of his body in his leap drove the Malay from his hold, and, freed thus from one enemy, Murray made another desperate effort as Ned rolled over, got his right arm free, dashed his fist into his enemy's face, and sprang up.

"Now!" he panted, "all together for the boat."

He was striking out right and left now with nature's weapons, sending one man down, and keeping others at bay.

"Where's Ned?" he panted.

"Never mind me, uncle; run!" cried the boy.

"By-and-by," muttered Murray, striking out again and repeating his nephew's manoeuvre, but with the addition of a blow on the ear which knocked over the man seated on Ned.

"Now then, are you ready?" cried Murray, as Ned sprang up; and the Malays now gathered together, and after a few moments pause: "Look out!" cried Murray, "spears!" for the enemy were coming on again. But at that moment the doctor and Mr Braine pressed to the front, and four flashes, followed by the sharp reports of their revolvers, checked the assailants for the moment, and the party began to retreat rapidly.

But shouting excitedly now, the Malays pressed on, and two spears whistled by the ears of the retreating party.

"Ah, ye cowards!" cried a familiar voice; "tak that then," and shot after shot was rapidly fired, one of which was followed by a hoarse cry, and a man went down.

"Sure, I forgot all about it before," said Tim; "and I hadn't so much as a shtick."

"Silence!" said Mr Braine, sternly. "Don't fire again without orders. Forward, quick!"

It was quite time, for there was a loud confused noise of voices from all sides now, and, greatest danger of all, from the river to which they were hastening fast. Lights were gleaming amongst the trees, some of which Mr Braine saw were from the prahus, and it was evident that they would soon have an attack to repel from that side.

"No, no," whispered Hamet, just then. "This way."

For in his excitement Mr Braine was leading the party wide of the boat, which was reached at last, just as lanterns were moving on the river, and voices were shouting from different directions.

"Now for it!" whispered Mr Braine. "Quick! All in! Every man take an oar. We must make a dash for it. The stream will help us. Don't attempt to fire unless they board."

"No, no," cried Hamet again, as they struggled into their places; and there was so much authority in his tones, that for a while all paused, and the Malay silently took one of the poles from the side, and keeping the boat well under the shelter of the bank, forced her up stream instead of down, always keeping close to the shore.

Mr Braine saw the wisdom of the act directly, for the boat progressed slowly and without a splash, being a good thirty yards away as Murray's guards reached the bank just below where they had embarked.

An eager shouting and interchange of questions followed; two lights were seen moving down stream in a zigzag way, and all at once a dazzling blue light began to burn a couple of hundred yards from them, lighting up one of the prahus moored in mid-stream; but though every figure on the large vessel, and the shape of another near, stood out plain, the fugitives were in darkness, and though they felt that they must be seen, Hamet worked calmly and steadily with his pole, sending the boat

higher and higher, the force of the stream being only slight so close to the bank.

Then, again, the wisdom of his plan became evident, for the bank was now dotted with dammar torches, and their swarthy bearers could be seen holding them over the water as they hurried down stream toward where the closing in of the jungle would soon preclude further progress on foot.

The blue light burning in a vessel on the first prahu died out, but before it was extinct another flamed up from the second prahu, and the scene was wonderfully picturesque to the little party still moving up stream. Both banks were lit up, with the shapes of the trees standing out distinct and clear, while the river seemed to flow on like glittering steel, on which, growing distinct now, three nagas were visible for a few moments and then disappeared.

By this time Hamet's efforts had sent the boat four hundred yards above the last prahu, and as he grew more distant, his strokes grew quicker and less cautious, till it was wonderful what speed one pair of arms kept up.

And now for the first time Mr Braine leant forward to the man and whispered: "Well done; but you are taking us farther from safety."

"No," said Hamet, quietly. "Up the river. Hide. Some night creep down. Back to Dindong."

"Yes. I see," said Mr Braine. "He is right."

Silence was preserved once more, and Hamet kept on so close in-shore that the overhanging boughs swept the thatched roof of the boat. Then all at once he thrust down his pole deep into the gravelly sand, and, as it were, anchored the boat.

"Now," he said, panting with his exertions; "all take oars and row."

"Yes," said Mr Braine, eagerly, and the oars were seized; but Hamet uttered a low "hist!" and all listened.

For a few moments English ears failed to catch that which had struck upon the more keen sense of the Malay, but soon enough they could hear beat—beat—beat—beat—the sound of rapidly plied oars, and it was plain that a naga had now come up the river in pursuit.

Chapter Twenty Five.

A Determined Pursuit.

"Lost!" said Murray, bitterly.

"No," replied Mr Braine, quietly; "they have to take us yet."

"Hist!" whispered Hamet, and parting the overhanging boughs, he forced the boat in till, as far as they could tell, they were hidden—a branch acting as anchor—and they listened to the water rippling by them, and the beat, beat, of the oars.

Sound travels so rapidly over smooth water, that it was long before the fugitives could feel that the boat was close at hand. Then, on it sped nearer, and above the sound of the oars came that of voices in low, angry discussion. Two of the leaders were evidently disputing, and their words were plain to three at least on board.

Abreast now, and becoming then just visible through the drooping boughs, and as Ned and Frank sat together, hand clasped in hand, the unspoken question was: "Will any of the keen eyes on board see us."

"Our escape cut off this way," thought Ned, the next moment; and then he placed his lips close to Frank's ear and whispered, for the boy had suddenly given his hand a quick pressure.

"What did they say?"

"It was the Muntrie," whispered Frank in the same way. "Says there is no boat missing, and that we can't be on the river. The only boat out is the one up by, where we are in prison."

"Hist!" came from Hamet, and instead of the sound of oars growing fainter, they waxed loud.

The boat had been turned, and swept by them again down stream, the search being deemed useless.

Ten minutes after, when the beat of oars had died away, the boat was thrust out again, and all joined now in sending her up stream with a quiet steady stroke, which was kept to for a couple of hours; and then all at once the river mist began to be

flushed with opal tints, the haggard faces of the occupants of the boat grew plain, and marks of blood were detected and rapidly washed away.

The bright sunshine and some refreshment sent a gleam of hopefulness into every breast, and the men rowed on with renewed energy. They were all together now, and if they could manage to sustain life for a few days, they would be able either to reach the campong of the neighbouring rajah, and throw themselves on his mercy, or, after hiding, drop down the river some dark night.

As the sun rose higher, their exertions began to tell; the strokes given by Frank and Ned grew more feeble, and a suitable place being found, the boat was run in under shelter among the overhanging boughs, and an hour's rest taken. Then once more forward, in spite of the heat, till well on in the afternoon, when, as Frank and Ned were again resting, and the boat was slowly making way against the stream, Ned spoke, for the first time for quite an hour.

"I suppose we've passed the place where they took us."

"Eh?" cried Frank, starting. "I don't know. I forgot that. I say, Hamet, hadn't we better go on the other side of the river?"

He had hardly uttered the words, when a spear flew from among the bushes not many yards away, and stuck in the bottom of the boat close to where Hamet was seated.

Mr Braine snatched his revolver from his waist and fired in the direction of the enemy, who replied with a couple more spears, both of which fell short, dropping into the water with a light splash, for Hamet had made a tremendous sweep with his oar, and sent the boat's head round toward the farther shore, so that in a minute or two they were out of danger.

"I will not fire again," Mr Braine said; "not that it much matters, for these men will warn any boat which follows that we have gone by."

At last the heat began to be less oppressive, and better progress was made. The party were divided into two crews, one of which rested while the other pulled, the four ladies insisting all through the night in taking an oar, so that as the sun rose next morning, they had reached the spot where the party had made their first exploring trip—the open park-like tract beyond the jungle, with a view of the hill-country in the distance.

“Why not halt here for a few hours!” the doctor said. “It is impossible for us to go on without getting food, and to stop at any village means danger.”

His propositions were acceded to, and the boat run into a nook, where it was hidden from any one passing along the river; and the possibility and risk of shooting something to supplement their supplies were being discussed, when once more Hamet raised his hand.

There it was again, the faint beat of oars a long distance off, but plainly indicating pursuit; and with the knowledge that the enemy on the bank would tell of their passing, it was decided to land at once and strike for the hills. The mist would hide them for the time, and if their boat was not discovered, it would still be available after the danger had passed.

Very few minutes had elapsed before they were all ashore, and once more taking the way through the park-like country, Frank acting as guide, and taking care to keep his party well hidden from the river; an easy enough task, as the open glades were well furnished with clumps of trees, each of which acted as a screen from any one who might be in pursuit.

Of this, however, as the hours passed, there seemed no sign, and place after place was recognised in passing. The morning was glorious, and to the great satisfaction of all, game was seen to be sufficiently plentiful to set famine at defiance. But, of course, no shot was fired, the efforts of all being devoted to reaching the hills, where the first halt would be made for rest and food.

The comparative coolness of the air as they ascended, the lovely scenery of the higher ground, and the feeling of hopefulness that danger was escaped, at all events for the present, made the long tramp pleasant; and the ladies laughingly disclaimed all feelings of fatigue, when Mr Braine called a halt beneath a huge tree high up on the slope they had ascended, and from which they had their first glimpse of the river they had left.

They had just seated themselves about the baskets, and were laughingly sharing out the shrunken remains of the provisions hastily gathered, when the doctor said, “How long do you think it will be before the Rajah gives up the pursuit?” when Tim, who had been getting his breakfast ready, as he merrily whispered to the boys, and withdrawn to take it in smoke some distance apart, suddenly jogged his master’s elbow.

“What is it, Tim? Oh yes; you are not forgotten. This is our—”

“Sure, we’re none of us forgotten,” whispered Tim, pointing.

And there, to the horror of the party, in a bend of the river, and apparently close to the spot where they had landed, lay two large prahus in the broad sunshine.

Every eye was fixed upon them as they glided straight in their direction along one of the bends of the winding river.

“Well, he means to capture us,” said Mr Braine, quietly, as the prahus disappeared behind the trees; “but he will have to land his men, and even if they came on at once, it must be hours before they reached here. So breakfast, dinner, or whatever it is, and then another start.”

The sight of the prahus did not act as an appetiser, but the meal was eaten, great care being exercised that no traces of their stay were scattered about, and then once more the word was “Forward!” and the tramp for safety recommenced in silence.

As they went on, Frank pointed to where Murray had shot his various specimens and found the pieces of tin ore; and they went on higher till a comparatively open spot was reached before crossing, where, as they were now so high, Frank stopped to reconnoitre, gazing down with shaded eyes into the plain and along the park-like slope they had ascended.

“I can’t see any sign of the prahus, Frank,” said Ned. “There’s nothing on the river. Oh!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Something flashed half a mile away there. Look down to the left of that great tree. That’s the one where we stopped to eat.”

“Spears. I see,” whispered Frank. “Here, Hamet.”

The man stepped to his side.

“Look!”

Hamet crept forward and peered between the leaves of a bush, and gazed down for some moments in silence. Then turning, he said calmly:

"Thirteen of the rajah's men. They are tracking us by the marks we have left, and will overtake us in less than an hour."

This was spoken in broken English, but no speech was ever more impressive to the hearers, and the gentlemen pressed together, while the ladies listened as if to their fate.

"Well," said Mr Braine, hoarsely. "You see. What do you say? Surrender or fight?"

"Fight," said Murray, after exchanging a glance with Amy; and the two boys uttered a faint "Hurrah!"

Chapter Twenty Six.

Overcome.

"Now forward," said Mr Braine in a low earnest voice. "The plan will be to keep on till we come upon a place that we can hold against attack. Frank, Ned, lead on with the ladies; we will come last. Quick, and in silence. Single file."

Frank led on, but at the end of half an hour no likely spot had been found, and distant shouts told that their pursuers were closing in.

Mr Braine came now to the front.

"We must have some place found at once, boys," he whispered, avoiding the inquiring looks of the ladies. "If it is only a patch of rocks or a dense clump of trees."

But no such spot offered itself, and on all hands he could see how easily they would be surrounded and at the mercy of the enemy.

At the end of another quarter of an hour they were approaching a steeper place than usual, but their pursuers were very near now, and the gentlemen owned to themselves that though they might shoot down a few of their enemies, the Malays would certainly conquer; when Ned, who had been staring about him wildly for some minutes, suddenly uttered a low cry.

“Here, quick!” he cried. “Follow me;” and turning at a sharp angle to the left, he seemed to be going almost back to the enemy.

“Stop! Are you mad?” whispered Murray, dashing after the boy and seizing his arm.

“No. I know the place: this way.”

“Yes, follow him,” said Mr Braine. “He may know;” and without hesitation he ran after Ned for a few hundred yards, till the boy stopped to gaze about him wildly, as the voices of their pursuers were now very plainly heard.

“It was somewhere about here—somewhere about here,” whispered Ned. “Yes, I know! Here!”

He pointed to a narrow rift just before him, and into this, as the ladies came up, he led them; the others followed, and they had hardly all passed from the heat and glow of the day into the cool darkness of the cavern into which Ned had slipped on his first expedition, when a big swarthy-looking Malay brushed by the bushes which masked the entrance, followed by two more, who paused and shouted.

“The heathens!” muttered Tim, who was the last to enter; “they’ve found us, and I’ve lost me poipe.”

There was an answering shout, and the men went on, while those in the cave breathed more freely. They were for the moment safe.

There was shout after shout, now more distant, now close at hand, for, to the dismay of the fugitives, the Malays did not go far, but, as if scenting their prey, turned back, and came by the narrow crack again and again, and those within wondered that they passed it unseen, for the eager excited faces of the Malays were plain enough, and once they were not more than twenty yards away.

“There is some reason for their hanging about,” whispered Mr Braine, as he stood there pistol in hand. “They must know of the place.”

As he spoke there was a fresh shout, and four spear-armed men came to where the big fellow the fugitives had before seen was standing, rolling his opal eyes in every direction.

There was an answering shout from high up overhead, and as Ned stood gazing out past Mr Braine, he saw one of the men down the slope give a sudden leap, stoop down, and after securing something, hold up a bamboo-and-reed pipe.

"Bedad, they've found it," murmured Tim. "It fell out of me pocket."

"You've lost us now, Tim," whispered Frank.

"Whisht, sor. I couldn't help it. I haven't been meself since I took the masther's rat poison."

"You didn't, Tim. Father told me. You drank too much wine."

"Murther! Masther Frank. Why, so it was. It did get right into me legs."

"Silence!" whispered Mr Braine, sternly. "Ready with your arms."

He raised his revolver as he spoke, for the men who had disappeared had returned strengthened, and began to search eagerly about. Then one of them uttered a cry, pointed, and, levelling their weapons, they came on.

"Stand back!" roared Mr Braine, in their tongue; and he fired a shot over their heads.

This checked them for a minute, and they drew back behind the bushes to begin throwing spears, but the missiles only struck against the rocks at the side of the rift, and finding their efforts vain, they paused for a few moments. A few words ran from bush to bush, and Mr Braine whispered a warning, "Be ready;" and directly after, the more ominous word, "Fire!"

It was time, for the Malays dashed forward, kris in hand, but from out of the cave a scattered volley of revolver shots greeted them so warmly that two dropped, and the others fell back, followed by their wounded companions.

"A moment's respite," said Mr Braine. "Reload. We can beat them off."

A moment's respite, but not a minute's, for there was a wild shriek from the interior of the cave, and a chill ran through Ned. He had recalled the entrance to the place through which he had slipped, and he turned just as there was a rush, a burst of yells

from within, answered by others from without, as the Malays again came on.

Then there was a wild struggle, the pistols were useless, and now thoroughly mastered by their lithe antagonists, all the efforts of the last few hours proved to have been in vain, for Mr Braine, Murray, the doctor, Mr Greig, Tim, and the two boys lay bound where they had been dragged out among the bushes, with the ladies seated weeping by them, and only one of the unfortunate party spoke.

It was Tim, who turned to the boys.

"Look at that now," he said; "I niver had a chance, and I've murthered one hand hitting it against the wall."

"Never mind," said Ned; "perhaps our time will come."

"Faix thin, me lad, I'd like to hear it shtrike at wanst."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

A Bad Return.

It was a dreary tramp down to the naga lying close beside their own, fastened to a tree on the river-bank; but though the two wounded men scowled at them, and even at the doctor who had offered to, and did dress their wounds, the rest of the Malays were respectful and friendly enough, for the Resident and doctor were favourites with them, and they could all recollect acts of kindness. The ladies were helped over difficult parts, and refreshments and water were freely offered to those who had, as the Malays thought, naturally enough tried to escape, while they on their part had received orders to recapture them, and been successful.

Then once more they were afloat, and for the first time Ned recognised their guardians of the jungle prison from which they had been rescued by Hamet, these men going back in their own boat, now reverted to its proper crew.

So the two nagas floated gently down the stream in the afternoon, reaching the campong at last; but they went down so leisurely that it was dark when they reached the jetty, shouting and beating a gong to announce their return in triumph.

Everything seemed very quiet at the village, and Ned tried to pierce the darkness and make out the place where they had lain in hiding, and that where they had landed to try to rescue Murray.

"I say," whispered Frank, rousing up from the despondent state in which he had sunk, "try and count the prahus."

Ned turned and looked in the other direction, but it was too dark, and he said he could not see.

"I can't either, but it seemed as if there were four."

The men sprang ashore, and secured the two boats before bidding their prisoners come out, and as one by one these landed, Mr Braine overheard a little of their conversation.

"We are to be all taken straight up to the rajah's," he whispered. "Keep up your courage, and let's hope yet. All may be well after all."

"Very kind of you to say so, Mr Braine," replied the doctor, "but—"

There was no time for further converse, the Malay head-man giving an order, and the whole party were marched off the jetty and up the broad path leading toward the rajah's; the crews of the two boats following with regular military step, till they reached a narrower part, where the way led between two houses, when suddenly, as if they had risen out of the earth, a body of men blocked the road, and guard and prisoners were halted.

Then there were cries of excitement, and orders given to retreat, but another body of enemies blocked the road in their rear.

For a few moments it seemed as if the prisoners were to be in the centre of a desperate encounter, but a few sharp commands sufficed to make the Malay guard sullenly give up their arms to a force ten times their number, and then the march toward the rajah's house was continued, but under a fresh guard now.

"What is the matter?" whispered Ned. "Is the rajah angry with them for taking us?"

"I don't quite know," said Frank. "It seems to me that— Wait a minute or two, it's so dark, and I can't make these men out."

They were marched directly after into the enclosure, now a blaze of light from the number of lanterns and dammar torches stuck about. The place, too, was filled with armed men, and as they were halted just at the foot of the steps, a Malay officer in scarlet and yellow came down, looked eagerly at the English party, and then signed to them to follow.

Frank tried to get to his father, but he was not allowed to advance till the ladies had all ascended to the broad veranda; then both lads were ordered to go up, and they followed their seniors into the rajah's chief room, now brilliantly lit, and dotted with his chief men, while he sat on a bamboo stool at the far end in his gorgeous uniform as upon their first meeting, the Tumongong sitting upon a second stool upon his right.

"Ugh! the old guy!" whispered Frank. "I wish— I say, look—it isn't him. Why, Ned, what's happened?"

The reason for this exclamation was the rising of the Tumongong, to tower above the double rank of sword and regalia bearers on either side. And to the astonishment of all present, he stretched out his hands, and, in very fair English, as he took Amy's and kissed them, said:

"My dear child, Allah be praised that you and yours are safe! Mrs Braine, Mrs Barnes, welcome home."

He kissed their hands in turn, and then greeted the gentlemen warmly before turning to the boys. "Frank—Edward Murray," he said, "safe; no one hurt? I am very, very glad."

"But," cried Mr Braine, eagerly, "the rajah?"

"I am the Rajah of Dah now," said the Malay chief with a touch of hauteur in his tones. "Are you surprised?"

"No," said Mr Braine, warmly. "Thank God! I knew that some day it must come."

"When the fruit was dead ripe, it would fall," said the new rajah, solemnly.

"And Sadi?"

"The tyrant, the robber and oppressor of all who ascended and descended this river, is dead, sir, and with your help, I hope that a new period of peace will open on the land. The time was ripe at last, and I sent to my ally here, Rajah Alleen."

This chief rose and was presented to all in turn, bowing with Eastern dignity, and the scene would have been impressive but for the Malay's vanity. The gorgeous military uniform of his enemy had excited his cupidity ever since reports had reached him of its splendour, and the minute he had made an almost bloodless seizure of the campong, he had claimed it as his spoil, received it readily from his friend the ex-Tumongong, and arrayed himself in it ready for the return of the English people, whom he wished to impress.

He succeeded far above his expectations, for that night, when back at his old home, Frank said merrily:

"Why, it don't fit him half so well as it did poor old Sadi."

"No," assented Ned. "But—dead! how horrible!"

"Yes; one of his own men killed him, they say, for every one hated him except me."

"And you liked him?"

"No, I don't think I liked him," said Frank, taking up the kris Hamet had replaced in his hands; and then, with a shudder, hanging it upon the wall; "but he was always very kind to me."

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Tim proves himself a Driscol.

But for the presence of two strange prahus and their enormous crews, who seemed more than could be packed in the long swift vessels, it seemed impossible to believe in the great change that had taken place.

For the Resident, the doctor, the Greigs, and Murray were back in their houses, where the new rajah's people were constantly showing them tokens of their master's good-will. The people of the campong were all *en fête*, and the place was given up to rejoicings as they began to realise that new days were in prospect, and a man might call his life his own.

And not the least puzzled of the occupants of the place was Tim, who suddenly came confidentially to the boys as they sauntered back into the garden.

“Masther Frank,” he said, “will ye have the goodness to pinch me arm?”

“Certainly, Tim,” cried the boy.

“Aisy lad, aisy. Don’t take the pace out. Thank ye; it’s all right. I am wide awake.”

“Of course you are.”

“Oh, but I didn’t know. I thought perhaps the masther’s rat poison was still on me strong.”

“Go along; it was the wine!”

Tim’s eyes twinkled, and just then he heard himself called, and hurried in.

“It is a bit of a puzzle, Ned, isn’t it?” said Frank. “I could hardly believe it at first. Hallo! What now?”

A party of the rajah’s officers were at the gate to summon the doctor and Resident, with Murray and the boys, to an audience, both these gentlemen being at the doctor’s house.

His highness received them with a great display of genuine, manly dignity, and with a showy retinue about him. He then spoke to his visitors in the Malay tongue, the Resident translating as of old, and bade them welcome to his court, assuring them of his friendship and of that of his people as long as they would stay.

He was thanked, but there was considerable hesitation in the way in which his offers were received. Then refreshments were handed round, and finally the court was dismissed, only the guards remaining outside, while the rajah led his visitors into an inner room, where coffee, sweets, and fruit stood on one mat, pipes on another.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the rajah, “pray seat yourselves, and we will smoke. My dear boys, there are sweets and fruit for you till you wish to go.”

The boys did not wish to go, and as soon as they saw their elders settled down to their pipes, they began, as Frank expressed it, “just to try the fruit,” and that fruit was tried, and obtained most favourable verdicts in every case.

At the end of a short conversation, the Resident said respectfully:

"May I ask your highness—?"

"Stop," said the rajah, laying his hand upon the Resident's arm, while the boys looked on and listened, "we have known each other for some years now, and I hoped that I had merited your friendship."

"Indeed, yes," said Mr Braine; "but you never trusted me even to speaking English, though I always felt that you could."

"My dear Mr Braine," said the rajah, "if I had spoken English to you alone some day, I should have betrayed myself, and—believe me, I wished to live. My predecessor was suspicious in the extreme, and you know how those fared whom he disliked."

"Yes," said the Resident with a shudder.

"I could speak English easily ten years ago. And, now henceforth, when we are alone, let there be no formality. You are an English gentleman. I have always tried to be a gentleman too."

"You always have been one," said Mr Braine, warmly.

"Thank you," said the rajah, holding out his hand. "Then, now listen, I want the help of my friends. By your guidance this land has grown powerful, but unfortunately it has been for evil. I want it to be powerful now for good. Stay with me as my friend and counsellor.—You, too, doctor, and Mr Greig; and as for you, Mr Murray, I am not quite the barbarian you think. Let all those past troubles be as an ugly vision of the night. Forget them and stay. I can admire your pursuits, and it will give me great gratification if you will make this place your home. My elephants and boats and men are at your service, and, of course, you are free to come and go as you please. You hesitate! Come, come; I implore you. Doctor, you will not forsake me?"

"Hang it, Tumongong—I beg pardon, I mean rajah, no."

"There," said the rajah, laughing; "I have you too. Murray, you will not go. I am not blind."

Murray held out his hand.

"In the cause of science," he said, smiling, "I stay."

"I ask for no more," said the rajah. "Here boys," he cried, "you've had enough fruit; you are going to stop. Frank, my lad, at any time you want anything, ask me for it as your old friend."

"Thank you," cried Frank, eagerly; "then I want something now."

"What is it?"

"Give me a new kris."

"Why? A handsome one was given to you."

"Yes," said Frank, with a slight twitching of the brows, "but I'm not going to wear that again."

The rajah took one of two that he was wearing and gave it to the boy.

"Keep it as my present," he said; "and I hope, boy, you will live to see the day when the kris has given place to good honest laws which protect people so that they can go unarmed."

There needs no telling how, as soon as the rajah's ally had gone, the campong settled down to its everyday life, but that life grew more and more new. The Resident and the doctor stayed; Mr Greig began to make trade flourish; and Murray went on with his collecting, working energetically for six months, when he was obliged to return to England with Ned.

But they were both back again within six months more, and a friend of Murray's accompanied him. He was a clergyman, but a great naturalist, and he joined his friend in collecting, till one day there was a great festival, for an English gentleman was married to an English lady, a certain Mr Wilson coming up from Dindong to be best-man. Afterwards the happy pair went down the river and along the coast to Malacca to spend their honeymoon; while Ned Murray stayed at the campong to look after the specimens and enjoy himself to his heart's content.

Then the happy pair came back, and there was constant talk of going back to England when the collecting was done; but the collecting never was done, and Murray set to work to write a book on the natural history of the place, that meant years of delightful work, so they stayed on to see the land improving month by month, and find the rajah their firmest friend.

A couple of years had passed, when one day Frank, who had developed a great love for mineralogy, and Ned, who promised to be a great authority on botany, came upon Tim Driscol busily improving the Murrays' garden.

"What are you doing, Tim?" said Ned.

"Jist putting in a few of Miss Amy's—"

"*Mrs*," said Frank, sharply, and Tim slapped his own mouth.

"Av coorse," he said. "A few crapers and a bit of chumpadah, and some scinted things she likes. Oh, it's a baste of a place, but one must make the best of it."

"Why don't you go back to the old country, then?" said Ned.

Tim gave him a droll look.

"Bekase I'm a Driscol, sor."

"And what's that got to do with it?"

"Sure, Masther Ned, there nivver was a Driscol yet who didn't know when he was well off."

"Why, Ned," cried Frank, laughing, "he's a philosopher."

"Yis, sor," said Tim, "and I get more so every day. But, by your lave, when are you young gentlemen going back?" They answered together: "I don't know."

The End.